

# Commit to the Bit

**DoSomethingElse**

## Commit to the Bit by DoSomethingElse

**Category:** IT (2017), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** 2017-Movie Based, Abusive Parents, Alternate Universe - Crack, Animal Abuse, Body Horror, Child Abuse, Child Guardian It, Child Neglect, Clown Antics, Definitely OOC, Especially the Adults, Frightening Illusions, Gen, Hardcore Bullies, Humans are the Real Monsters, IT Spoilers, Pennywise Doesn't Know How To "Human" Correctly, Pennywise is Not An Evil Entity, Preying on Those Who Deserve It is Fun, Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault, Slurs, So The Goonies but with Aliens, The kids are still terrified, You shouldn't take this idea too seriously, and no gold, but... I like cutesy shit, not here

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Derry Kids, Eddie Kaspbrak, Georgie Denbrough, Mike Hanlon, Pennywise (IT), Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

**Relationships:** Pennywise (It) & The Losers' Club, The Losers' Club

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-09-11

**Updated:** 2017-10-20

**Packaged:** 2020-01-29 12:38:41

**Rating:** Mature

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 12

**Words:** 31,273

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Pennywise never learned how to interact with human people in all the years he'd been living in Derry, Maine.

## 1. (1) A Beginning

### Author's Note:

BEFORE YOU COME FOR ME - I do enjoy the original Pennywise as a murderous, evil asshole and the original story is great! It's just that I personally enjoy messing with the whole 'pure evil' thing as well, and thought it was hilarious how Pennywise can't get his shit together when he's doing basic stuff (like walking to one kid or keeping his eyes in-tact). I'm not trying to romanticize or excuse this fictional character's canonical actions, I'm just doing my own weird thing with these characters.

If you don't like safe, warm stuff in a horror movie genre, I apologize, but please don't harass me about it. I'd like to keep expressing my ideas without suffering through that.

*It stayed in the darkness, cooped up in a cozy, hand-chosen area beneath a long abandoned house. The well that It retired to every 27 years or so felt like a comforting entrance into its abode, stacked high with trophies and treasures that belonged to the curious and curiously small residents of Derry, Maine.*

*Derry had been It's home for longer than 200 years, and yet many of the lost valuables belonging to its children had crumbled without ever being returned. Instead, like It itself, tricycles, dollies, miniature umbrellas, toy trucks, sandbox and bathtub toys remained in the darkest of reaches below the ever-changing town. Many of these things had crumbled to dust and scattered within the unchecked sewer system, in fact, or stayed floating in place out of some sentimentality that It remained victim to.*

*For as long as the cosmic entity had hunkered down in the pipelines of Derry, Maine, It had never been encountered any child willing to retrieve its possessions within the mainline.*

---

*“Be careful.”*

Georgie had already raced after his water-swept boat by the time his brother's voice on the walkie-talkie registered. He was preoccupied with the fun of trying to keep up, so much so that Georgie forgot to look where he was going and soon bashed his head, first against a police roadblock just a few lawns down from the Denbrough house and then against the paved street beneath it.

Woozy and short of breath, Georgie crawled beneath the roadblock while trying to regain his sense of direction. Amid the blurred vision onset by the rain and the fall, the child saw a slice of white steadily roaming down the lush of rainwater rolling down the sidewalk and he made a run for it. Panic rose in the child's throat as he spied the dark, rectangular mouth of death that was one of several sewer grates on their suburban neighborhood streets fast approaching.

“No!” Georgie cried, just as the paper boat sailed away and away, right down into the gutter. “Bill's gonna kill me!”

The little boy knelt in the pouring rain, feeling it seep into his jeans and into the toes of his galoshes to wet his mismatched socks, and peered into the pitch blackness beneath the sidewalk. Georgie couldn't see a thing, much less the little paper boat that Bill had worked hard to make and that Georgie himself had risked life and limb in getting wax for.

“Oh... where are you?” Georgie whimpered, wishing that the boat never fled from his *watchful* care.

He squinted into the darkness, as if it would help him see through the

perpetual night beneath the road and find the long-gone paper creation. He was so caught up in his relentless, pointless searching, that Georgie nearly leapt back ten feet when he did manage to *see* something. A flash of beady black surrounded by a simmering, stuttering yellow-blue met Georgie's gaze from within the grate.

The 6-year-old squeaked, just as he heard someone speak from out of the sewer.

"Hiya Georgie!" The sewer said, voice just as squeaky. "What a nice boat!"

He could still barely see a thing, but the bizarre eyes were smiling at him, one more askew than the other. It was more than a little unnerving to the child, who shook slightly at the unexpectedly conscious, person-like thing that had answered him.

Georgie clapped his hand over his mouth, feeling droplets of water splash on his cooling skin at the motion. "Um, thank you."

He wasn't supposed to talk to strangers. He knew he wasn't supposed to, even if said strangers were hard to see and sounded kind of strange and breathy as this one.

"Who're you?" Georgie couldn't help but ask, rationalizing it in his mind that if he knew the name behind the voice, that he'd be able to get past punishment from his mom, or risk disappointing Bill of all people.

The child's brow scrunched. He didn't want his bestest best friend to be mad or disappointed in him for breaking such a simple rule.

In answer, a pale as the moon hand stretched out and hovered within the boy's line of sight – it was a very human-looking hand, much to Georgie's surprise while he leapt away just that much more – but what caught Georgie's eye first and foremost was the paper boat in its grasp. The boy reached out to grab it, and was instantly rewarded.

"You don't want to lose it." The soft, pitchy voice was hard to decipher then, as if whoever stood in the sewer below was moving away with every word. "Bill's gonna kill you."

"She." Georgie said without thought, strangely dry paper secured in his hesitant fingers. "You call boats 'she'."

The eyes never blinked nor changed shape to indicate that whoever it was, was emoting at all, and yet by the tone of its voice, Georgie had seemingly stunned it.

"She." It repeated in slight awe.

It paused in silence, and the child wondered if he should go or stay to talk with whatever was talking back to him. Young or not, Georgie was lacking when it came to decision-making, and he often left what was important up to his big brother.

"You should get going, Georgie." The voice came as soft as ever from

inside, so soft that it's counterpart had to lean in to hear properly. "It's getting dark, and you're already cold."

The little boy looked back, in time to see the tips of white fingers retract back into the dark beneath the walkway. Georgie stared for a beat, and another, before his attention returned to the S.S. Georgie, already wincing at the cold, mushy feeling of his socks as they squished between his toes. The boat itself looked like it hadn't sailed on water at all, for as much as it looked brand new while Georgie turned it over in the rain.

He shrugged after a time, glancing back one last time at the mouth of the grate before trudging back up the street to the Denbrough home and out of sight.

## **2. (2) Establishing**

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

What's wrong with Georgie?

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

The reason why this chapter came out so quickly is because I was already working on it a couple days ago. Originally, the first part was supposed to include all this, but I got tired of the massive editing and I have no doubt I've left some grammatical mistakes.

I hope you enjoy despite that. I'm rather pleasantly surprised by those willing to give this fic a chance.

Georgie sloshed water in the bathtub happily despite the irritating ache behind his eyes. He drifted in and out of being hyper-aware of the headache building inside as frittered with his bath toys. True, they were mostly just regular toys – aside from the obligatory rubber ducky that Bill had insisted on when he was Georgie's age – but they were no less enjoyable to have while he got clean.

Bill sat beside his little brother, cotton sleeves rolled up to his elbows as he sat on the edge of the toilet and watched Georgie play. They were letting the conditioner in the boy's hair settle and coagulate before Bill rinsed it off.

Mom had been more than a little irate that Georgie had gone outside while it was practically storming in Derry. She hadn't let either of her sons justify the need to go outside and play, even though it had been days since they could go out in the first place. Both boys needed exercise, as Bill had tried to point out while all three trudged up the stairs to their bathroom, and it was boring to stay inside playing board games and card games all afternoon.



“Georgie c-c-can’t even play on the playground at school.” Bill had insisted above the roar of water from the tub’s faucet. “The school doesn’t want everyone to get s-s-s-sick.”

Mom eyed her oldest son with a thin-lipped grimace. She wasn’t going to understand, not when she already didn’t want to.

“Well, no wonder.” She reprimanded, undressing the shivering, overly-quiet Georgie. “Your brother is already soaked to the bone after being in the rain for 10 minutes. I can’t believe you just let him leave this house while it’s storming!”

Bill bowed his head and looked at the tiled floor. No matter how old he got, or how responsible and grown-up he felt, Bill couldn’t get past the hard edge that formed in his mother’s tone when she was angry at them. It always stung to hear her disappointment in them, whether it was fair or not.

She looked at Bill sharply before guiding Georgie into the tub and sitting him down. Bill wanted to protest at her turning the faucet on while his little brother sat in the empty tub, startled and due for an uncomfortable time in cold bathwater, but he didn’t want to hear Mom tell him off again. Instead, Bill went to get the box of bathtime toys that were kept in his room and rushed back into the bathroom when he heard his mother’s footsteps retreating down the stairs again.

“I’m sorry Bill.” Georgie hiccupped when his brother returned.

“It’s okay, Georgie.” Bill set the box down and squatted beside the tub’s edge, seeing Georgie’s eyes fill up with tears. “I sh-should’ve said no, then you wouldn’t be sick like me now.”

The waterworks wouldn’t stop, but the little boy sniffed to keep the tide of them at bay. Bill patted his bare shoulder before sticking his hand in the water to feel the temperature, and deciding to turn the knob above the faucet down some more to make it warmer.

The door to the bathroom swung wide open again as their mother bustled through, automatically handing one of the kitchen cups from downstairs to Bill. In her other hand was their only wireless phone, large enough to look like a child and held just as carefully by Mom as she fidgeted between addressing the boys and talking with whoever was on the other line.

“It’s Lisa.” Mom said, head tilting in the phone’s direction. “I’m gonna take this, but I’ll be back in a couple minutes. Can you start helping Georgie wash his hair?”

Bill nodded, mumbling in the affirmative when Mom was already turning her back on them and shuffling out of the room. At least she left the door ajar, making Bill assume that she really would come back to help.

That had been 20 minutes ago. Bill could still hear his mother chatting away in their parents’ bedroom in one ear as well as he could hear Georgie at play, rolling two Hot Wheels against the bottom of the bathtub beneath mounds of bubble bath suds.

Every time he wasn't staring at the door, slightly bored, Bill couldn't help but smile at Georgie's hair and how they'd gotten it to stick up like a candle wick.

"Okay, let's wash it out n-now." Bill said, already crawling to the tub and taking the cup from off its edge. Georgie let go of his cars, and tensed in preparation for another head rinse. He was only half-submerged in the water and his top half was cold, making him shiver with the dueling sensations.

He tensed, but then Georgie's mouth worked while the pressure in his brain subsided somewhat. "Bill?"

He waited while his brother turned the faucet on again and filled the drinking cup.

"Yeah?" Bill kept the cup steady as water dripped from over the rim.

"Have you ever... when you're walking down to the bus, have you ever heard somebody talking to you?" The younger boy asked.

"What, you mean like Richie?"

"No." Georgie tipped his head to the side. "I mean from the place underneath the sidewalks. Where the water goes when its running down the driveway?"

“Th-the sewer?” Bill’s face scrunched comically. He looked at Georgie as if the six-year-old had asked him why you couldn’t drink expired milk. “No?”

He was a little too loud in his denial, and felt a second of guilt at the embarrassment that colored his little brother’s cheeks.

“I heard somebody.” Georgie defend himself rather snottily, to hide his hurt feelings – something which Bill had undoubtedly taught him by example. “I really did! I... I almost lost the boat we made! Because it got lost in the sewer! But then somebody gave it back to me from in there.”

“What’re y-y-you talking about, G-Georgie?” Bill sat the cup down, and water fell over the side of the tub and onto the floor. “Nobody lives in the sewer.”

“I *told* you, *somebody* gave me back the boat!” He insisted. “Honest, Bill! They even said ‘hi’. And they told me to come back home cos it was cold out!”

“Okay, okay!” Bill humored him, then looked over his shoulder in case Mom was closer than he’d originally thought. “I believe you G-Georgie. Just don’t tell Mom and Dad, o-o-a-alright?”

“Alright...” The little boy agreed with a pout. “But I can show you, Billy. Next time, when we come back after school tomorrow, and then you’ll *really* believe me.”

“Yeah, if Mom doesn’t pick us up after this. Or if-if she lets us go back to school at all.” Bill pondered flatly.

He’d already been given the okay to go back to school earlier that day, as although he was still sweaty and tired, Bill’s fever had finally broken. Usually, school was the last thing that Bill Denbrough had to look forward to, unlike his little brother who didn’t have actual bullies to worry about, yet.

But again, being stuck in the house for even a three-day period was enough to make Bill restless. He missed his friends, and missed get to walk around without slipping on eggshells around their parents who, while they generally weren’t strict, still found ways to be abruptly disapproving at any given time. Sometimes it was downright cruel, when you could do a hundred questionable things one minute and then get called out by Mom or Dad on something small and practically harmless. Returning to math and public speaking classes were a relief compared to that.

“I’m sorry I almost lost the boat, Bill.” Georgie sniffled after a bout of silence. “I didn’t mean to let her get away.”

Beside Bill, Georgie had frustrated himself to the verge of tears again, wiggling in the tub with itchy, stiffly conditioned hair. He was starting to crack again while Bill gestured for him to lean back and get ready for the water that Bill had taken up again.

Bill resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He could see the paper S.S. Georgie still sat on his desk in his bedroom, right above from where the chest of tub toys was stashed. It was a little weird, Bill had to admit, that the boat was clearly rained on as far as its ‘sail’ was concerned, but that the bottom that should’ve crumpled by now was pretty much dry.

“D-don’t worry about it.”

Little kids cried too much, Bill decided with a sigh.

“Okay, clo-o-se your eyes.” Bill waited for Georgie to obey before he poured the fresh, warm water over his brother’s head. The white of the suds fell around Georgie’s shoulders, warming his skin in spots.

The boy shook his head like a dog, rubbing his eyes as a precaution against soap getting into them, and laughed himself silly when Bill protested at being in the splash zone. Georgie laughed until he opened his eyes and the searing pain in his head tripled with the burn of the bathroom lights and his own quick movements.

Georgie held his head in his hands and started to cry, full-blown hot tears burning his tightly-shut eyes. Bill hesitated, pressing up against the bathtub until his chest hurt.

“What’s the matter? Georgie? What’s wr-r-ong?” Bill reached out, in time to hear his mother’s brisk steps hit the tiled floor of the bathtub.

The phone was still on her hand, but she let it from her ear at the picture of Georgie bawling his eyes out. “What did you do?!”

Bill nearly cowered next to the tub. “N-n-nothing! He just started crying! I don’t know w-wh-”

“Move!” Mom barked, slapping the phone down on the sink as she knelt at Georgie’s side, effectively pushing Bill away to get to her younger son.

Bill felt a lump form in his throat as his mother attempted to calm his baby brother, whose cries only got worse. He decided that if he stayed any longer, Bill would start crying over the combination of being at the brunt of his mother’s panic and the sound of Georgie in pain, so he left. Bill tried to ignore the echo of his brother crying and the erratic beating of his heart while he went into his room and sat at the edge of the bed.

Bill hugged himself, wishing Georgie's screams would disappear altogether.

---

On Monday, it was only Bill who returned to school, with Georgie stuck in bed and unable to articulate why everything hurt as much as it did. Talking creatures in sewer grates were the farthest thing from Bill’s mind on the way to and back from Derry High School.

While he’d once been grateful to be able to go back and see Richie, Eddie, and Stan again, Bill couldn’t keep his worry for Georgie’s sake out of his head.

He was sullen in every class, spacing out every other moment of the day while barely registering the looks he’d received from Eddie in both Gym and Spanish class. Richie had even prodded him with a spork all through lunch, dutifully sticking to his role as trashmouth in their circle of friends, but it did little good.

“It is probably a cold, like your mom said.” Stan took initiative, attempting to be thoughtful when both Richie and Eddie hadn’t the skill set to even try. The boys were all a little out of their element, truth be told.

“I w-wasn’t hurting that much when I was sii-ick.” Bill replied, stuffing obsolete an obsolete algebra book into his backpack. Lower class-men lockers were tasteless additions to the building and neglected by most of the kids that dealt with them (it was unanimous that lockers weren’t cool or certified until you became a real high schooler - whatever that was, and that was that) often being relegated to conduits for untouched schoolbooks during most of the year.

Bill was pretty out of it, even he knew that, and yet his friends had sought the lockers to have a semi-private “man-to-man” talk. It didn’t matter much what they did to begin with, of course, since no one cared about what the losers had to say in general, but it was the principle of the thing that mattered most.

“People’s bodies react differently to illness.” Eddie picked up. “When my mom had a cold, all she wanted was ice cream. It was all she could eat, but I bet – I bet you and Georgie didn’t want ice cream.”

“Bill and Georgie aren’t fatasses like your mom, though, Ed.” Richie affected the air of a hospitable doctor practicing bedside manner, reveling in the offended expression on Eddie’s face. “At least Georgie didn’t go missing like Veronica Myers.”

“Shut the fuck up, Richie!”



When the day was over, all three subsequent losers had given up on trying to have a full conversation with Bill. Instead, they talked quietly amongst themselves, leaving Bill to stare out the window during class and watch raindrops swirl on the glass panes while the wind dragged them together and apart.

---

His baby brother could barely open his eyes, and at the dinner table later that Monday evening, he had had such a hard time keeping food in over the pain that had extended to his jaws that their father had exploded at the dinner table after work.

“He won’t stop crying.” Mom had explained, slightly tremulous at while she had to look her husband in the eye. “He hasn’t stopped since yesterday. It’s been on and off, but even he doesn’t know why he’s hurt.”

“Well damn it, Sharon. Let’s take him to the emergency room, then!” Zack Denbrough exclaimed, senselessly throwing his knife and fork onto his plate in disgust.

“I already thought of that!” She snapped back. “But I think it’s just a cold. He was out playing on Sunday, without permission; right in the middle of the rainstorm no less!”

“I didn’t see any bleeding or bruises. We should just try Tylenol unless it gets worse.” Mom tried to sooth the atmosphere in the room, to save herself from having to argue with the boys’ father. They

didn't have the kind of shared family insurance that allowed for a willy-nilly trip to the hospital, especially if Georgie was succumbing to a bad cold and nothing more.

Regardless, the dinner was ruined while Bill sat, stiff and at a loss as he played with the peas and carrots on his plate and ignored everyone until Dad told him to take Georgie back upstairs.

Bill was carrying Georgie to his bed by the time they'd reached the second floor of the Denbrough household, and he tried not to think too hard on how Georgie's skin burned.

"Bill." Georgie laid the bed, pale and dwarfed by the overflowing bedspread. He looked like a fragile baby bird in the center of a great but hollow nest. "I'm cold."

"I g-got you, Georgie." Bill lifted the covers and drew them around his brother, tucking the loose edges in around the little boy's body and bringing up to rest underneath Georgie's chin.

They could hear Mom and Dad arguing downstairs, the sound of which drifted through the open doorway like an oppressive, near-tangible dark cloud. The rainstorm had followed everyone inside, or so it would seem, drowning everyone in a gloomy deluge of anxiety and confusion. Why couldn't it just stop? Why couldn't everything just be calm and quiet for a minute? It might've been irrational, but Bill felt as though the yelling and the blaming were just making Georgie sicker.

"Stay." Georgie's tiny, twig arms shifted beneath the covers as though

he meant to reach out to his brother even while encased in blankets. Bill rested a hand on Georgie's arm comfortingly, trying to think of something positive to keep himself afloat and unaffected by their parents.

And Bill stayed.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I love Georgie and Bill's relationship. It's much sweeter and sadder in the movie as opposed to the tv series. Not much Pennywise or trash-mouthing in this chapter, but stay tuned.

### **3. (3) And You Miss It**

#### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Poor Bill is helpless.

Before Bill knew it, the rest of the week proved to be as insufferable as he had hoped against. Although he felt perfectly fine by Tuesday, Bill found himself stuck at the bedside of his little brother, trying to keep him company. What was worse was by that time, Georgie was barely able to communicate outside of grunting, whimpering, or shrieking while tears cascaded down his round cheeks.

Bill spent most of his time sitting next to Georgie, despite the stale air around them and the pain that lingered on his brother's face. Mom had taken to staying home more often while Bill was at school, at least, but whenever Bill walked through the front door he found his mother on the phone or practicing her piano.

It didn't even help to be outside with his friends, not when staying too long in the Barrens or after school to walk to the alley behind the drugstore made Bill feel overwhelmingly guilty. The fact that Georgie was sick and alone in bed was always in the back of his mind as of late.

Soon, a full week since Georgie had gone out to play in the rain overlapped into two weeks. Three weeks. A month.

It felt to Bill like every week came with some new excuse as to why their parents could put off taking Georgie to the hospital. First it was just a cold, then Mom had declared that it was the flu, and after that it was pneumonia – but none of those probabilities were enough to get them up and out the door.

And, despite himself, Bill was getting angry. It was the worst kind of angry as well, the kind that turned into a broiling stomach ache and that forced hot tears from his eyes that he had to hastily wipe away while at his desk. He stewed inside, imagining a hundred different ways in which he could persuade his mother to stop denying that there was something seriously wrong with Georgie. It wasn't like she really knew how difficult it was for Georgie to breathe all the time, or how the power of his headache could go from a two to an eleven in one whole hour. Mom didn't hang around long enough to find out how bad it'd gotten.

Bill could see it in his head so clearly – he pictured himself stomping over to his stiff, silent parents while they read the paper and toiled at the dishes mechanically. He could see himself, hear himself opening his mouth to shout at them and take his brother to a doctor, vividly. He just wanted... he just wanted –!

Bill couldn't put it into words, but knew that even if he could, he'd screw it up one stutter or another.

How did you articulate that you wanted better parents, right to your parents' faces? That you wanted them to *actually take care of Georgie* for once instead of leaving the difficult parts to you? Especially when you'd practically been both Mom and Dad to Georgie since before he left Elementary school?

Bill saw his Moment so clearly, and saw the ideal versions of his parents responding in a variety of ways – being proactive, immediately whisking Georgie away to the hospital, tearfully apologizing for their behavior, among other things.

But these were daydreams that, at best, left him empty and tired. The most that Bill could accomplish, being young and impeded by his goddamn stutter, was getting worked up over an unsolvable issue.

---

“Bill Denbrough.”

Bill sat up in his seat, flexing his already shaking hands that had gone sticky with sweat. He found that although he could ignore a lot of classes without failing any tests, Bill couldn't tune public speaking class out. He couldn't have lost focus over it, even if Richie were sharing the same class schedule and talked through every lecture.

It didn't help that most lessons required student participation, and that many projects required groups of three and four to stand up in front of everyone and speak. Nothing could've been more jarring, or as comparable as getting wailed on by Henry Bowers and his toadies.

Bill felt his stomach plummet to some lower, nebulous region in his body as he stayed put, feeling the pressure with all eyes on him.

Mr. Martin stood at one end of his desk, spectacles perched over his hawkish nose. “Come up and recite what you choose for your weekly project, please.”

To stand up from his seat and trudge the distance long distance from the back of the class to the front, and posture himself in front of the blackboard, was like taking your final walk before you landed on death row. Denbrough teetered between the desire to be as fast as possible in getting his speech over with and adhering to the code of how one should speak after they'd been practicing it for so long. For Bill, speech therapy was relatively new, but not as new as it was for Mr. Martin's current class that comprised of either the shiest of kids or those that had no other options.

He'd had a fair few lessons on what to do in this kind of situation, when you were all alone and reading from a shakily held notecards in your hands; but every time he had to genuinely face it, Bill forget everything he'd been taught.

*Calm down.*

Bill's breath hitched. He looked up from the cards in that he was crumpling, but the sea of faces in front of him looked no less apathetic. Patrick 'Pockmarked' Hockstetter sat in the far corner of the class, grinning like a feral animal.

*Don't look at them. Look at your notes.*

"A-ah... Ah..." Bill refrained from squeezing his eyes shut. Terror descended on him like an icy wave, and he couldn't get it out of his mind that this was stupid. This was so stupid. Why did he have to be so bad at this?

*It's not you. It's not your fault.*

Bill had no other choice but to close his eyes when he felt the prickle of tears. He was being such a baby.

*It's alright. It'll be alright. Look at your notes, and I'll help you.*

*We'll do it together.*

"Mr. Hockstetter, not one word!" Bill opened his eyes, letting his gaze pass between Mr. Martin's stern glare and Patrick, whose snaggles

teeth cut across his lower lip as he prepared to jeer.

*Amidst the mists and coldest frosts...*

Bill took a breath. "A-a-amidst the mists-s and coldest frosts-s-s..."

*He thrusts his fists against...*

"He thrus-sts his f-fists-s against-st," Bill repeated.

The soft, reassuring voice in Bill's head was unrecognizable while it continued, until both it and Bill were speaking in tandem. He spoke aloud, and yet Bill could hear his words and those coming from an unidentifiable place outside of all other awareness bleeding together and forming a harmony.

Before he knew it, Bill had reached the end and was greeted by a ring of mundane, unenthused applause (as was required after every speech).

"You get points, Mr. Denbrough, for trying your hand at a tongue-twister." Mr. Martin smiled. "Please return to your seat now."

The smile vanished the instant Bill was safe and hunched behind his desk again.

"Hockstetter. You're next."



---

“Watch where you’re goin’, Tits!” Patrick laughed, mouth wide open to display his jagged overbite.

He’d gotten enough of a thrill just pushing the new kid down ‘accidentally’ that there was a spring in his step as he sauntered away, and Bill supposed he could see why. Bowers’ gang had laid off sticking it to one of their favorite targets: Bill – since everyone seemingly knew about Georgie’s situation, yet he’d just managed to score a knock-down by kicking the new kid, whose gut was generously wide, into Bill as they were leaving Mr. Martin’s class.

Patrick got a two-for, as it were.

Bill didn’t pout or mope over it. He quietly and quickly scooped up the scattered speech cards that he’d idiotically decided not to pack up before he left, until a pudgy hand and the clatter of bulky headphones against the solid floor caught his attention.

“I’m really sorry.” Ben said as Bill accepted the assignment back with a polite, nervous smile of gratitude.

“It’s o-okay.” Bill replied. “It was Patrick Ho-ockstetter’s fault, not yours.”

Ben shifted uneasily in place, fingering the headphones held between his hands. For being a new kid, he sure didn’t understand the clear rule that you shouldn’t be caught dead interacting with a Loser for

longer than you had to.

“Yeah, but I mean I’m sorry... about your brother.” Ben was earnest. “I heard... I mean I wasn’t trying to eavesdrop or anything, but I heard he might have to go to the hospital. That’s awful.”

“Y-yeah.” Bill swallowed. “My mom thinks it’s just the fl-u but...”

Ben nodded when the other boy couldn’t finish the thought. It didn’t need to be finished with words, as Ben could practically feeling the shared discomfort between himself and Bill while the other boy shuffled his index cards and tucked them in the drink pocket of his backpack.

“Well-l, I have to go s-so I don’t miss the bus.”

“Okay, um, see you later then, I guess.” Ben waved a little before subsequently wishing he could smack himself upside the head for being so awkward. Bill didn’t taunt him however – he simply mumbled and plodded off, already slipping back into the inattentive state that had plagued him over the past couple of months.

It was getting easier to return to that phase, so much so that Bill preferred it to being aware and chained at the present.

“Oh!” Ben turned around. “I thought your rhyme was good, by the way...”

He watched Bill Denbrough leave the hallway, completely deaf to his words, and only just realized that he hadn't introduced himself at all.

---

The bus ride into his neighborhood had left Bill with a massive headache. He had to stand still and wait for the worst of the carsickness to ebb, enduring the chill wind of on-coming winter as it traveled into whatever opening in his clothes that it could find. Richie hadn't ridden the bus home that day, leaving the Head of the Losers without a buddy system or a repertoire consisting of one-sided jokes. It was lucky, really, since Bill didn't think he could handle another 'Greta's on her period' joke while he was feeling this nauseous. Bill didn't want to put up a front either, not when that too required copious amounts of energy.

What about Richie didn't require copious amounts of energy?

Bill cursed internally when the slimy taste of copper flooded his mouth and alarm bells went off in his head over the possibility of him throwing up. He bent over and counted to sixty before hobbling forward so that he could cross the street. It took some time to brace himself, but Bill made a break for it and sped over the street without looking both ways, just to repeat the whole routine again.

It continued until Bill was adjusting on Hemlock Street, where a swirl of color bobbing in the afternoon breeze made the boy do a double-take and turned the residual nausea into a backburner haze.

Balloons hovered from above the grate across the street – from one of the side sewers just a block away from the Denbrough house. The sight of them, red, blue, and yellow, drew Bill like a magnet from one side of Hemlock to the other.

Bill was silent as he stood in front of the grate, blinking in confusion as the triad of balloons... hovered from out of the mouth of the sewer entrance. Denbrough bent down before the sidewalk, edging at dark, rectangular gap next to the road with the memory of Georgie's rainy Sunday at the forefront of his mind.

Bill spoke before he could second-guess himself. "Hell-lo?"

Aside from the echo of his own voice, Bill was treated to silence and little else apart from the faint rush of water from the mild rainy weather some days ago.

He waited for an answer nevertheless, but a minute had gone by and when nothing else happened, Bill pulled the tassel from out of the grate easily. His confusion increased as a notecard dangled from the ends, having been tied with the random offering. Perhaps it was a strange thing to notice, but the notecard looked the same as those that Bill had dropped in the school hallway earlier.

The card rotated in the wind like a windmill's turbine, from an uneven puncture in one of its corners. Bill stared before reaching for it and held it up to his face. He saw chicken scratch handwriting, marginally smudged, all over it.

*Bill,*

*I hoPe this chEers you UP a littLe.*

*From,*

*WheRe the waTer goes wHEN it's runnING dOwn the DrivewAy*

---

“Bill, get your coat.” Dad was searching around the coffee table and the sofa when Bill had managed to get all three balloons in through the front door. His father didn’t even look up, sparing his son from an interrogation about his unusual find.

“Wh-what’s going on?” Bill asked tentatively, just as Dad snatched the keys up from beneath a Cosmopolitan magazine. Bill could hear the faint sound of sobbing from around the hall, from somewhere near the kitchen.

He let go of the balloons, and they floated through the air just to bob and bounce against the ceiling that kept them from soaring into the sky.

“Georgie won’t wake up.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thank you so much for reading! I'm overwhelmed by all the kind comments, and don't worry if I don't get back to you right away, I always make time to respond but sometimes it takes a little while. I also apologize for the continued build-up in these first

few chapters, it's a slog even for me to write in certain places but it will pick up soon.

Let me know if the onomatopoeia is overdone, please. I'm not sure if it's helpful when you read or not.

## 4. (4) Roadrunner

### Summary for the Chapter:

It's easy to make friends, Ben.

Veronica Myers had returned to school, out of the blue, after being missing for nine days. It didn't take much for the county police to declare a person missing in Ben's new town, and she'd been on the cusp of being declared permanently missing – dead, but put in a nice way.

She looked pale and dazed the first few days after her return, but although Ben had never had the chance to speak with her, he felt as if he had a good inkling in that she wasn't like that all the time.

Not that he was going to bring it up when he'd been grouped with her and her friends, and had become the odd duck out as both the only one that none of the girls knew and the only boy. Period.

"I'm fine." Veronica croaked. "What happened while I was gone."

The two girls adjacent to her didn't bother hiding their shock and confusion over how dismissive Veronica had become. They even turned to each other like characters in a teen comedy, silently communicating their disbelief with one another.

"Nothing, really." Paula ventured, running fingers through her bright blonde hair in a nervous tick. "Just the same shit all day, every day."

"You missed the Halloween dance. And Mr. Martin stopping

our entire class to yell at Patrick Hockstetter again, and again and again.” Betty grinned teasingly, and was treated to a frail smile from Veronica for her efforts.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here for that.” Veronica giggled along.

Ben’s eyes dragged across the room while he tried not to feel discomfort over being blatantly disregarded. There were an uneven number of students in Mr. Martin’s class, which was to be expected, but Ben, while itching for a book to distract him from mind-numbing girl chatter, felt uneasy.

“... did you hear Bill’s kid brother got into some kind of accident. He’s in a coma.” One of the girls said in a hushed tone. Ben pivoted slightly in his chair; that was why he was uneasy. He hadn’t seen Bill Denbrough since Thursday last week, but the rumors surrounding his disappearance had flat-lined for a while.

From the corner of his eye, Hanscom saw the little color in Veronica’s face drain. “Seriously?”

“Yeah. Well, I mean nobody knows for sure. But Richie and Kaspbrak were basically shouting about it in front of the flagpole.”

“But he left right before you came back, and he hasn’t been in class since.” Betty’s conspirator whisper was too loud to be secretive, but apart from her words dying down with a look from the shuffling Mr. Martin, she never stopped. “Some think his mom locked him out of the house for a whole night.



“Maybe Bill did it.” Her friend smirked. “Probably pushed him down the stairs or something. When you’re a loser at school and a loser at home, you have to fight for attention.”

Ben’s knuckles turned white as he balled a hand into a fist beneath the desk, but as soon as he’d turned around completely, he saw Veronica’s eyes as wide as saucers. She looked at nothing, staring off into the distance while Betty and Paula nattered on.

All four shot up in their seats, as the sound of a throat clearing from their right interrupted the lull in conversation.

“Excuse me ladies, and gentleman.” Mr. Martin looked over the rim of his glasses. “Is this an appropriate classroom discussion? I don’t think so.”

---

Ben tugged his backpack on one strap at a time, and hefted the bag up as best he could. He had stuffed it with tome-like books from the public library – the first place that Ben had taken refuge in that wasn’t his aunt’s house.

The bell rang, but most of his peers had had one foot out the door regardless of the teacher’s complaints. Ben hadn’t minded waiting at the desk until everyone else filed out, as he was planning on going back to the library again.

He’d been overly cautious after being pushed out of this very same class last time, anyway.

Ben opened the door and strolled through with relative ease before he was seized and tugged viciously in the opposite direction.

He heard a dauntingly familiar voice in his ear. “Hold up, Fat Fuck.”

And in front of Ben materialized Victor Criss, glowering in the emptied hallway. He walked backward as Ben was shoved and his shoes squeaked as he skidded forward.

“Did you know Henry was looking for you last week?” Victor was far too close for comfort, like a physical omen of death. “But you never showed up like you were s’posed to. That’s just bad manners.”

Ben shuddered. “Look, I-I didn’t know –”

“Sure you didn’t. Cos a pair of tits like yours are easy to find, huh Tits?” The front doors of the school opened with an eerie rattle as Vic held the door open for them. Ben felt the strain of his backpack straps as they cut into his arms, and he like a dog on a chain-link fence, scrabbling for its bearings from an abusive owner.

Without Vic ahead of him, and the town wide open before him, Ben weighed his options. Patrick and Vic were bad enough, but he absolutely didn’t want to be anywhere Henry Bowers. Ben didn’t need to adhere to rumors to guess that that Bowers was the most dangerous of all the bullies living in Derry. He was borderline psychotic to Ben.

Teeth gritted, Ben used all his might to propel himself backward. The act didn't push Patrick down, but without Victor to cage him in, Ben used the advantage to slip his arms out of the straps and spring forward. He wasn't in the best of shape, but Ben had had plenty of experience with Fight or Flight, especially while living *here*. When he wanted to run, he could run, sprint, dodge and dash with best of them.

"He's getting away!" Vic's cracking voice seemed to come from a mile away, and Ben ran faster. Gravel collecting on the roadside flew from beneath his feet, which barely touched the ground as he made his getaway.

Ben looked over his shoulder briefly, and saw Patrick's murderous expression not too far behind him. Being grabbed unaware was one thing, but that one look nearly made Ben's bladder empty completely. He was a rabbit being hunted by snaggle-toothed fox, down the street and over a hill and through a bridge.

There was a bridge up ahead, in fact. He was barreling through the northern part of town so fast that he'd completely missed the turn to the public library and was headed over Derry's primary canal.

The younger boy slowed as best he could, before pivoting just before he contacted the Kissing Bridge's old, unstable planks. It was a long shot but as he rounded back, Ben was just in time to see Patrick head straight into one of the posts.

-

Patrick's head bounced off the bridge wall and he collapsed to the ground behind Ben, who kept sprinting without looking back.

Patrick's eyes fluttered shut as he momentarily lost consciousness, and when he woke with a jolt, he immediately felt a ricking throbbing all throughout his skull.

Hockstetter groaned, groping for purchase against the splintered wood around him, and managed to climb up sideways until he was standing back on his feet. The world around Patrick spun, but he could barely take light reflecting off the clouds in the sky or the pallid color of the bridge underneath him. To make matters worse, the taste of blood filled one side of his mouth. The acrid fluid, thick and tangy, hit the boy's senses in all the wrong ways and he already puking up onto the bridge.

Wheezing, Patrick gripped himself around the midriff and waited for the burn of his dry throat to become tolerable. Eyes squinted, he kept them trained on the ground and it was like the pain inside grew ten times worse.

"Fuck." He hadn't just lost Fatass, he'd also knocked one of his teeth out.

---

At least he knew where he was going.

Ben staggered around, forgetting the name of the path he was trying to tread, but estimating by the sight of the grass growing tall and the large, sprawling trees. The mainline emptied out in the rocky channel on the outer edges of Derry, running through what everybody referred to as the Barrens. It was nearby to a larger body of water, merging filtered sewage with the river, Ben had landed near the channel in his haste.

Penobscot River. The water led into Penobscot River.

He'd begun running while dragging shallow breaths, but by the time he was sure Patrick would have to have given up on him (today), Ben's gasps for air were ragged. He crashed down a gentle slope, saving himself from tripping over the rockier terrain at the last minute.

There was another boy, standing in the middle of the stream between jagged rocks and unmovable stones. His dark skin and dark hair were touched by the waning sun above as he concentrated on not stabbing a hole through his sneakers.

Ben watched, trying to think if he'd ever seen the other boy before. He looked familiar, but Ben couldn't match his face to a name.

"Why're you standing in the canal?" Ben asked impulsively.

The dark-skinned boy flinched, looking up with quicker reflexes than Ben might've dreamed of having had he been more athletic. The tension in his body made him go rigid to the point where the muscles in his bare neck and through the outline of his shirt were visible, but the unknown boy deflated just as quickly. Ben met his gaze head on.

The other kid gestured down to his shoes, and Ben could see for the first time through the surface of the creek water that the other boy's gray shoes were stained with pale red. There were darker flecks reaching up from his ankles and climbing along his pant-legs, nearly up to his waist.

"Bowers threw water balloons at me while I was riding my bike." The other boy said. "But they weren't filled with water."

Ben felt ubiquitous rage for the boy as he got closer, and a splash was heard as he stepped into the shallow liquid as well. “They threw balloons with paint at you?”

“Not paint. Blood. But I got away before he really pelted me. It’s probably from a cat or something that didn’t deserve it. That’d be pretty in-character for him.” The boy dipped his foot in deeper, swerving from left to right.

He didn’t wait for Ben to make a face of disgust or to noisily wretch or gasp, but Ben did all three. “You runnin’ from Bowers too?”

“He’s the leader, isn’t he?”

The other boy nodded.

“No, but Patrick and another one were chasing me. They just stopped suddenly farther back though.”

“I’m Ben.” There. He’d remembered to introduce himself, and even reached for a handshake like his dad would’ve done.

“Mike.” Mike returned the gesture, albeit more hesitantly. He looked at Ben and Ben’s hand in confusion for a few seconds beforehand, and Ben worried if he was being too formal.

Ben let go of Mike. “I haven’t seen you at school before. Is there a

different school apart from Derry around here?"

Mike shook his head, backing away to dry land. He looked at Ben pointedly when he wasn't followed, and despite the awkward helplessness he experienced in those few moments, Ben was more than happy to join him on the other side. They sat back on the wild grass and as Mike untied his laces and peeled off his socks, Ben felt the urge to do the same. It looked nice, to let your bare feet and toes wiggle in the weeds, and yet he didn't want Mike to think of him as a weirdo or a copycat.

"My granddad homeschools me, but we mostly do livestock stuff. I help him with the sheep and the chickens, and with the butcher shop too." Mike elaborated while wiping his feet against the ground.

"Oh. That's cool!" Ben could feel the blood collecting in his cheeks when Mike looked at him. "Is that cool?"

He rambled. "Sorry, I never lived near farms or around chickens and sheep and cows. Even now, I live with my aunt and uncle and we're in the suburbs, so it's not like that."

Mike snorted. "I guess. It's hard work though. What time do you get up for school?"

"Uhh, 7:30." Ben surmised. "I have to get up early for the bus."

"Yeah, when you work with farm animals, you have to get up when the sun does. Unless it's summertime."

They sat in silence near the water's edge, and the scent of the sour water as well as the clinging smell of blood made Ben's lip curl involuntarily.

"It's getting dark. I should probably head back home." Mike rolled up his socks and tugged his shoes back on, stuffing the heels of each foot in the holes without minding how it ruined the backs.

Ben started, unsure if he should rise or stay seated. "D-do you think it'd be a good idea if I walked with you, to your house?"

"Why?" Mike raised an eyebrow.

"In case, you know, Bowers still has some blood balloons or whatever."

It was like a stand-off, with Ben at the mercy of the one homeschooled kid (that he knew of) also just thinking of him as the new kid; the new, creepy kid. He tried not to nervously rub the back of his neck.

Mike didn't appear to be all that phased. "Thanks. But I think I'll be fine. You don't need to walk the long way with me when I stink this much, anyway."

"Right... okay..." Ben frowned, eyes narrowing in thought before a



lightbulb went off. "Hey, if you're homeschooled that means you don't have extracurricular stuff, right? I mean aside from the animal stuff and you working."

A small smile gradually began to form on Mike's face. He watched as Ben all but twiddled his thumbs anxiously.

"Do you think that maybe, if you're not busy, you'd wanna hang out? I think I saw an arcade when I first got here. Or there's the movies? Do you like, uh, horror movies?"

"Sure." Mike acquiesced with a fully-formed grin. "I'll ask if I can."

---

*'How come you have so many? There's enough here to fill the whole town!'*

*'I've been here for a long, long, long, loooooong time.'*

*Georgie giggled as the clown tapped his nose with one gloved finger. He'd been frightened at first, but he believed the person-shaped being when it said that the mindscape was the safest place one could be.*

*The little boy settled down, admiring It's collection as any little kid would. His smile faded. 'Alone?'*

*It stared back when Georgie looked up at It, with eyes that had finally*

*blended yellow and blue, the same blue as Georgie's mother's eyes and Bill's eyes. They were green now, those which Georgie dubbed Its' real eyes, and still crooked.*

*'I suppose.' The bells and ruffles and even the tips of its orange hair wilted visibly. 'Unless, you count when people dream.'*

*Georgie's lips thinned. He looked at the clown seriously. 'Mmm, I wouldn't.'*

*And the clown took his words very seriously. 'Oh.'*

## 5. (5) Cold Feet

### Summary for the Chapter:

We know what happened to Georgie... kind of.

### Notes for the Chapter:

I KNOW you guys want more Pennywise and more interaction with him and the kids. I'm sorry this chapter is more build-up and development, but I PROMISE he's going to feature in the next chapter. Scout's Honor!

Oh, and as always, thank you so much for the lovely reviews!

“He’s sustained blunt force trauma, likely from a head injury.”

Bill simply sat in an uncomfortable, nylon-cover chair in the corner of Georgie’s hospital room while the adults talked amongst themselves. Mom and Dad had lied about their youngest son to save face, but it wasn’t a surprise and Bill wasn’t going to bother calling them out on it. In this instance, bravery didn’t suit him and it was the last thing on Bill’s mind when he could scarcely look at Georgie lying in his hospital bed.

They set the little boy in an oversized cot after dressing him in a thin hospital gown and sticking an oxygen over his mouth and nose. Bill thought Georgie’s face had gotten paler since he’d held his little brother in his lap, caging him and crying quietly during the drive over.

Bill could drown out the discussion taking place on the other side of Georgie’s bed, as the monitor displaying his vitals beeped rhythmically and the IV Drip kept a steady drip, drip drip whilst it flowed into Georgie’s arm. Bill found that he could look at that and

not be as bothered as when he saw his little brother's motionless face.

"Did your son happen to bump his head during the past two weeks?" Their doctor stood with his arms crossed over his chest. "Maybe after playing a sport, or roughhousing with Bill?"

"George hasn't been playing any sports." Zack Denbrough glanced at his older son with a frown. "And if there'd been an incident with the boys, I'm sure I would've heard about it."

"There was nothing. Nothing." Sharon sniffed, tears genuine. "I thought he'd just caught the flu from playing outside, that's all. There was nothing that made me think he'd fallen or hit his head."

She turned to Bill. "Bill, sweetie. Did you ever see your brother get hit or did he ever come to you dizzy?"

Bill shook his head instead of speaking.

Dad's frown deepened. "Bill."

"Oh, it's fine. It's – Our Billy has a stutter, you see." Sharon apologized on behalf of her son's muteness, acknowledging the doctor with an overbearing nervous façade. "He doesn't talk much at home, either."

"I understand." The doctor said, neutral.

“But, so-so-so, how could he –? I mean, if there was no blood or bruising, or anything!” Mom broke down into hysterics once again, eyes shining as she pressed a hand to her mouth dramatically.

“Well, we don’t know when the incident occurred yet. Sometimes accidents involving concussions or contusions don’t result in anything for days, even weeks after they’ve occurred.” The doctor sighed. “On the more positive side, non-induced comas usually don’t last as long as people think. Your son could wake within a month, as I expect he should.”

“What if he doesn’t?” Dad asked. “Would he stay like this? Or... would he...”

The doctor raised a hand. “Death is rare. Even in the case of contusions, healthy children recover consciousness relatively quickly, and if not, George would likely go into a vegetative state before we’d done all we could to help him.”

“Regardless, I think George should be moved to a more permanent residence while we conduct another couple of x-rays and perform an MRI. You’re welcome to continue your stay here, if that’s what you’d prefer.”

Bill got up, unnoticed by either parent in their grief as he stood at the foot of Georgie’s bed. He stared at his brother’s feet peeking out from underneath the blanket, willing the little boy’s toes to wriggle, or for Georgie’s mouth to move so that he could complain that he was cold. Georgie didn’t like it when his feet were wrapped in the covers, a little bit because of the cold but mostly because he was afraid of a

monster grabbing him by the ankles at night. Bill's little brother had tried to claim otherwise, but Georgie was still in that phase of believing that things could hide under your bed or in your closet.

"I think my husband is going to take our Billy home, tonight or tomorrow." Mom's voice was so far away, Bill barely heard it in the back of his mind. "Zachary has work, and-and Bill still has the rest of the year to finish..."

Maybe Bill had ribbed his brother over his fears too much. He'd only been teasing, but...

He wondered if he'd be able to apologize when Georgie woke up. If Georgie woke up.

The ashen face of his little brother remained deathly still, even as Bill adjusted the blankets for him and tucked his small feet within them.

---

They were coming down the elevator to talk to the receptionist at the front when Bill stopped in his tracks. He approached the cluster of chairs on the only hospitable-looking patch of carpet in the whole building.

"Y-you're all here?" Bill stared at his three closest friends in shock. "Wh-why are you all he-here?"

He hadn't been thinking of the other Losers for several days

now, but they were all waiting promptly in the main lounge just beyond the reception desk of Derry General. Eddie, Stanley, and Richie sat, mumbling together in a wonky triangle of chairs while vaguely pissed off adults kept at a distance from their rambunctiousness.

“We wanted to make sure you were okay.” Stan said. “You haven’t been at school, so...”

“I c-c-ould’ve called you guys.” Bill retorted, blinking rapidly.

“Yeah, but you already did once. We thought we’d surprise you instead this time.” Richie nodded agreeably to his own words, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “I mean, it’s not *that* far from school.”

Bill stared at Richie incredulously. “The hospital is f-f-f-five miles from... outs-side town.”

“That’s what I said!” Eddie’s shirt sported damp spots near his pits and around the collar of his shirt. “We rode our bikes for a fucking marathon to get here. I didn’t think it was a good idea, but no one would listen to me. You know we could’ve been attacked by lepers or drifters, or – or wild animals, or something!”

“Aren’t drifters and lepers the same thing?” Stan asked.

“What’s the big deal? Your mom’s not gonna have a cow if you’re at a

hospital. This would be like her Nirvana.” Richie complained.

“What’re you talking about?! That’s a band, dumbass.” Eddie replied snippily. “And my mom is gonna kill me if I stay out while it’s dark. It doesn’t matter if I’m at a hospital or not!”

Richie wouldn’t let the Nirvana argument slide. “It’s a place too!”

“G-guys!” Bill saw the other patrons of the lounge, including the nurse behind the reception desk, giving their group nasty looks from all sides. His parents had already checked out by the time Bill got a chance to look around, meaning that they were probably at the cafeteria on the other side of the hospital.

The boys’ heads turned simultaneously, and the effect was immediate. The trio of fellow Losers met Bill’s gaze with looks of remorse, guilt, and concern.

“We’re sorry, man.” Richie said, correcting his glasses again anxiously.

“Do they know what happened to Georgie?”

“Not r-really.” Bill said. “They th-think it might be be-because Georgie g-got hit in the head, b-but they’re still doing test-s. He still has-sn’t woken up.”



Stan bowed his head, shrinking inward. That Georgie really was in a coma was difficult to process – for all of them. Bill’s baby brother was just as much a constant in the Losers’ Club as Bill himself was, and he was a sweet kid. Georgie was the only kid that didn’t think of his brother and friends as losers in the literal sense. Neither Stan nor Eddie nor Richie knew what it was like to lose a sibling, whether it be to an unexplained, unreachable sleep or death, either.

“Hey, I bet Eds could’ve fixed Georgie up before it was too late, if you got him out of the house.” Richie said after a while.

Stan hissed at Richie, a look of disgust on his freckled face.

“Bill wasn’t gonna take Georgie all the way to Richard’s Alley!” Eddie said, indignant. “And why d’you think I could’ve fixed him?”

Richie thrust his arms out, akimbo-style, imploringly. “You have all those pills. I figured some of ‘em were kick-ass mega aspirin.”

Eddie smacked himself across the forehead. “Oh my god, do you even hear yourself when you speak? You don’t even have the tact to change topic right.”

---

Ben didn’t like horror movies all that much. He figured he wouldn’t enjoy Pumpkinhead, not by himself, but if Mike thought it was cool then so would he.

After riding into the heart of town from the Hanlon's Farm entrance, (Ben had met Mike's grandfather, who was stern and icily polite, at the gate and still felt the man's rough and calloused hands on his own if he thought on it too much) the boys had decided to stop at the drugstore to buy candy. He was too old to be super – outwardly – scared, but Ben felt a thrill at the prospect of sneaking stuff into the movie theater as he'd never done it before. Oddly enough, Ben's uncle had seemed to anticipate it, since he'd been keen to give Ben his allowance money, but some extra pocket change to 'do with as he saw fit'.

He and Ben milled around the aisles, not paying attention to anything but the colors that flashed from each aisle. The candy section was always popping with color and obnoxious labels no matter what store you found it in.

"So, you don't have any brothers or sisters?" Ben asked, stuffing a bag of gummy worms back on its hook.

"Nope. I have two uncles that help with the farm, but one of them's just a close family friend." Said Mike. "You?"

"No. There's my cousin Ralph, but we're not close." Ben's nose twitched. "I actually don't, don't like him very much. You should see how my aunt babies him, it's disgusting."

Ben smiled sheepishly when Mike began to laugh. It was a nice sound, deeper than Ben's but not too much so.

The bell above the door tinkled and Ben looked up reflexively, catching sight of a girl walking through. He and Mike watched as she tentatively scanned the signs above each aisle while shifting from one

foot to the other. Despite the apparent discomfort on her face, Ben couldn't help but think she was the prettiest girl he'd ever seen in his life.

But then he'd seen her before.

Mike watched as Ben continued to gape at Beverly, feeling a smirk pull at the corners of his lips. "You know Beverly Marsh?"

"What?" Ben asked. "Oh... Well, yeah. She goes to my school. I've seen her once or twice in the halls."

Mike nodded, nonchalant. "Ever talk to her?"

"No..."

"Yeah." Mike picked up a new box. "Makes sense. She doesn't talk to most people, especially guys. It gets her into trouble with her dad."

"How do you know?" Ben asked, not taking his eyes off the red-haired girl.

Mike shrugged. He shook the box of Whoppers absentmindedly and listened as they rattled inside. He was grateful that boxed candies didn't cost that much, as it was difficult convincing his grandad to concede to giving him some money, especially when Mike didn't go out that much to begin with.

“Beverly’s dad is a creep. Everybody knows that.” He sighed at Ben’s look of confusion. “I don’t know how everyone knows. I think you can just tell with certain people.” The boy put the box back and looked down the racks. “Pretty sure my grandad suspects that there’s more to it, and the rest of the adults in Derry do too.”

Ben regarded Mike after Beverly was obscured by one of the far down aisles. “Then why doesn’t anyone ask her if she needs help?”

Mike inhaled deeply. “I don’t know. Adults tell you to do the right thing all the time, but you never know when. Sometimes it’s like they’re just as scared as us when we feel like we have to take responsibility.”

“You know?”

Ben thought about it as the girl they’d spent time talking about wound around the corner and walked cautiously down the same aisle as them. She was holding a boxy-looking package in one hand, but as soon as she made direct eye contact with both boys, the package disappeared behind her back.

By the twist of her lips and the hard line furrowed into her brow, Beverly was aware of what their conversation had entailed as well. She opened her mouth, about to tell them off.

“S... Sorry. Sorry for staring at you!” Ben blurted before she could, a little too loudly.

He tried to deflect by burning holes into the candy in front of them, but he couldn't help the compulsion that drove him to glance at Beverly again. Beside him, Mike turned on his heel and pretended he didn't have a part in any of it.

He didn't need to leave, as Beverly blinked at them in silence. She'd been caught off-guard by the nervous, painfully sincere boy in front of her, so much so that it took her a moment before she decided to approach them.

The red-head smiled the kind of smile that reached one's eyes as she stood in front of both boys, hands behind her back. She turned from one to the other good-naturedly.

"Hi Mike."

Mike waved at her quickly, plunging his hand down so hard it smacked the side of his hip and made him wince.

"And..." Bev stuck a finger in the air to point at Ben, eyes squinting as she considered him.

"Uh, 'new kid'. I mean my name is Ben, but I understand if you didn't know that before. Everyone at school just calls me..." Ben's face was bright pink as he trailed off, wanting to crawl into a hole and hide.

Beverly's eyes were gentle. "New kid. Yeah, I remember. It's nice to meet Ben, though."

The girl reached out to shake his hand, and while he couldn't help staring at her hand in sheer amazement, Ben smiled and returned the gesture. They clasped their hands together rather animatedly, and it was funny until Mike rolled his eyes when neither let go of the other. His gaze flashed over the analog clock above the pharmacy counter in the middle of it.

"Hey, we gotta go." He intervened, grasping Ben by the shoulder. "We're gonna be late for the movie."

"You guys are going to a movie? Which one?" Beverly asked.

"Um, it's a – it's the scary movie, um..." Ben snapped his fingers as he tried to remember the title. "There's a... a pumpkin or something."

"Ben!" Mike was already walking out of the aisle and up to the register.

"Okay!" Ben started for the same route, then doubled back. "Do you wanna come with us?"

Her smile quirked as Beverly curled loose hair behind her ear. "Nah, I think I'm good. Have fun, you two."

She waved as Ben was forcibly dragged away and whisked out the door.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Oh! And hey, if any of you want to talk or have questions or want to gush with me about movies, particularly this one, you can @ [mantisandthemoondragon.tumblr.com](https://mantisandthemoondragon.tumblr.com) <3

## 6. (6) Pennies Up The Drain

### Summary for the Chapter:

WARNING: This chapter is dark and twisted. Animal abuse, sexual abuse, and sexual assault are all included in this part, so please proceed with caution. I'm going to edit the tags to reflect this content, as well.

So here's Beverly.

### Notes for the Chapter:

I literally finished this and had to take a break for a bit, because I felt like such an awful person. You know when you think something or write something that disturbs you, and it makes you question if you're actually as twisted as what you imagined? Yeah, I'm not feeling too well after this one.

*Henry kicked him while he was down, aiming for the groin and getting an unfortunately high-pitched shriek for his efforts.*

*“You can’t even keep up with some fat little worm?” He squatted down, breathing the stench of stolen alcohol into Patrick’s screwed-up face. “What the fuck are you good for, Hockstetter?”*

*The pain of heading face-first into a bridge post had hung around after Patrick and Vic limped over to Bowers. He and Belch were wasting time, sitting around with cigs and alcohol on Bowers’ property – and since Henry’s father was on duty, they mostly put on a glum charade without a gun to fuck around with. Patrick had just about considered that giving up the chase for Tits wouldn’t land him anything less than a glazed look of boredom. But no such luck existed there, apparently.*

*Hockstetter bared his teeth in a half-leer, working his way between Henry’s parted legs and fiddling with the zipper instantly. He groped the*



*bulge there, and felt the blood pumping in his veins as the color drained from Henry's face.*

*"You know what I'm good for." Patrick taunted.*

*If the sickly pallor on his "leader's" face wasn't already funny, his lightning quick change from white as a sheet to plum purple with rage was absolutely gut-busting. Henry Bowers' could've made a chameleon jealous with his ability to himself with a change of skin color.*

*Patrick recoiled when Henry spat in his face and sprung up to aim a kick at his head, forcing Patrick to let go of his crotch.*

*The rest of their encounter had been lackluster as far as Patrick was concerned. He chose to walk off the stings of the rash he'd been given and the bruises that burned with the slightest brush of fabric against them.*

*Patrick didn't want to go home and listen to his mother nag him about his teeth. He'd already dissuaded her from making him get braces, which he knew were going to be a pain in the ass to take care of. He didn't want to pay for that shit, nor have the whole school buzzing like the little gnats they were behind his back.*

*So instead of facing his parents, Pat squeezed the fallen tooth in his fist and padded toward the junkyard. It was the gang's favorite place to fool around, in more ways than one, but it was Patrick's paradise. He needed to relax.*

*"Hey there," Patrick clucked, resting a dirty hand against the bunny's soft head. He watched for it to attempt a nip at his fingers, and smiled gleefully when it cowered at his touch. He'd been lucky to catch the wild thing, and had sunk in plenty of patience in keeping it alive in his special fridge until it pissed itself with fear.*

*Bunnies and rabbits – they were already nervous creatures by nature, having existed as prey for as long as Patrick had taken the time to notice.*

*It was even more pleasant than when the gang had gotten to poison Hanlon's puppy, or when Patrick had kept a wandering house cat hung on one of the busted pieces of metal from the fridge shelf, when Patrick dug the tooth he'd recovered into the rabbit's foreleg. He sighed breathily as the animal screamed and kicked its back legs out – sometimes Patrick considered this better than taking a drag from a cigarette.*

*He lingered there, teasing and prodding the creature until it was exhausted and laid down in wait for death. The blood loss wouldn't be enough for that, and Patrick intended to savor another day with the little thing soon. The boy pressed the ends of his shirt to the animal's wound until the dark red stopped soaking through, then patted its head. He smiled as he closed the fridge, and waited for a grand total of 60 seconds before going for one last scare. He wanted to see if it had some energy left.*

*He was startled the moment he opened the door, unable to hear the familiar clank of the busted kitchen unit over the shrill, piercing shrieks of some thrashing thing that was not a wild rabbit.*

Patrick's eyes widened. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out, and all the feeling in his arms and legs disappeared, leaving him with no other option but to stand there and look. He gaped at the sight of the infant that had taken the bunny's place, as it screamed its little blue head off.

---

Beverly had once assumed that the squirming feeling inside would slip away sooner or later when it came to being the 'apple of her father's eye'. But it never did, not with Dad.

The moment the coast was clear, the girl had run through the tiny apartment's halls after returning from a binder at the drugstore. She'd sent a silent 'thank you' to whatever god existed that her father wasn't yet home, and then she'd headed straight for the bathroom. There was something about locking the deadbolt on the bathroom

door that was immensely comforting for her. She'd reveled in it, letting her guard down enough to wear she could stay put and listen to herself take deep, normal breaths, but only for a moment... a long moment.

Even before Beverly heard the whine of their front door swinging, she'd taken her pack of tampons and emptied most of them in a hollow space beneath one of the bathroom tiles. Beverly had cleaned it out long ago, and although it wasn't that deep, she'd managed to cut into some of the flooring through pure gumption. It was also lucky that Beverly had found a small and workable gardening trough outside their apartment window when she was twelve.

When she could fit at least four tampons into the narrow pockets of space between her tube socks and her bare ankles, Beverly resealed the tile with chewing gum and sealant wax. She'd unlocked the deadbolt in complete silence and soft-shoed to her bedroom to hide the rest of her trove in the best places she could find. The wax could go on her desk and not draw any attention among her school papers and her markers, and the gum was fine beneath her mattress and the bed frame.

Although she hated to take her shoes off in the house, Beverly made the sacrifice and kicked them off and up into the air melodramatically. She caught both single-handedly.

Beverly tried. She always tried, and while the results weren't always stellar and she was stuck in this shithole until it was legal for her to move out with no questions asked, she believed that it was worth the effort to keep going. She didn't relax at any point as she made quick work of her class assignments – filing away answers and hoping for the best on more than one 'group' project that she'd been abandoned on. Beverly moved furniture around in her room, kept busy hiding the antihistamines and the melatonin at the back of the kitchenware cupboard, and forced herself not to retreat into the bathroom again.

She knew that if she did, she'd never come out, and there'd be hell to pay.

-

He'd come home in a good mood, but Beverly had been forced onto the couch with him, to spend quality time in front of the TV.

The show was some kind of parody of children's programming. A flamboyant room encompassed the screen and children sat in rows, fidgeting and smiling and picking their noses. The most eye-popping color in the room was white and orange-red, as a clown sat in the center of the benches and sang along when the stricken, exasperated hostess began teaching them a song. The TV wasn't loud enough for her to hear, but Beverly laughed silently as the clown got them all to sway from side to side, locking hands with a little boy in overalls, who joined along with a cherubic smile.

It was so silly and so harmless, but Beverly let the colorful images wash over her as she waited for her father to get heavier in his sleep. His muscles were relaxing, and she kept vigilant long after he'd begun snoring and his can of beer fell from the tips of his fingers to stain their carpet. You couldn't trust him not to start up again by appearances alone, even though it had taken Beverly several tries to learn that.

She waited until the veins in his neck twitched, and for when his eyelids fluttered as he dreamt before she deemed it safe enough to slide out of his claws.

Beverly was almost free in record time; it would just take a little maneuvering out of her father's heavy arm stretched around her

collarbone and her lifting her leg out from where he'd tangled Beverly up with his own.

She could put her weight on her feet, and was bending out from underneath his limbs.

She just needed...

She was so close...

"Beverly." His eyes had snapped open, and Beverly's heart rabbited in her chest at the striking look he gave her. "Where're you going, Bev?"

He wasn't as aggressive as he used to be, but there were still too many moments when he turned into her worst nightmare. Beverly felt it like a blow to the face as he snatched up her wrist and held her tightly until his face and hers were a glass window away from each other's.

"I-I'm... I'm tired. I was gonna go to bed." Beverly gulped inaudibly. "In my room."

She pitched forward sharply, caving in on herself before she slouched and the intense pin of pain that decided to come screaming its way up to her naval eased. Nobody had told Beverly about period symptoms, but it didn't take a genius to pick up those gross tidbits of info, especially in the gym locker rooms.

“Without your medicine? Hun.” Mr. Marsh acted wounded. He was inches away from placing his hand over his heart, and yet Beverly had seen this routine a hundred, if not a thousand times before.

“You know you can’t sleep without it, baby. Why do you even try?” He smiled, eyes shining beneath his brow.

The ache in her belly was yawning. It was a region expanding all along her torso until it fell like a corpse to her abdomen and tightened until Beverly felt like she couldn’t breathe.

Her voice came out, wispy and unsteady. “I... I can’t. I’ll throw up.”

The red-head couldn’t risk it now, not that she’d ever wanted to in the first place. Beverly wondered if her father, in-between his salacious acts that occurred when she was dead to the world, would think to keep her propped on her side in case she did throw up. If she was smothered and bloody, what then? Would he leave her alone finally?

“Why’s that sweetheart?” His mouth quirked, just like hers did when she teased. “What’s the matter?”

“You can tell daddy. Aren’t you daddy’s girl?”

Beverly whimpered.

“Bev?” He curled a rough, oversized palm around the back of her skull. “Sometimes I worry about you, hun. Sometimes I worry a lot.”

“D-don’t.” She begged, hating herself as he pressed his lips to hers and kept on even as she scowled. “Stop.”

The ache was all there was then. The ache. The ache. The ache. Expanding and grounding down.

“What’s that you got in your socks, Beverly?” His voice became hoarfrost. “Are those –”

She ripped away from his grasp with well-placed timing and hurtling backward, bounding straight into the coffee table below. The ache was joined by an all-consuming, penetrating stab into her side as she tucked and rolled away. Beverly planted all fours on the ground in a split-second, then propelled herself up and off the ground just as her father roared in outrage.

Beverly felt her hair catch in his hands as her father chased her down the hall and jostled her while she tried and failed and tried to unlock the bathroom door and escape to safety. He was yelling obscenities that flew right past her, but Beverly knew they were all ugly.

*Please. Please. Please.* She screamed inside. *Please, help me. Please!*

Her father's arm was against her side, snaking around so that he could press her to his chest and drag her back to whatever he had in store. Yet Beverly cowered at the bathroom door, pressing her whole body into it to pass through like a phantom.

She couldn't do that, but that she was still standing was enough to pick her up from her stupor of complete terror. Beverly heard a grunt and turned in time to see her father – a grown man – be hurled across the hall and slide on his back as far as one could throw him. When he tried to rise again, eyes bulging from his skull, he was smacked back down onto the floor. Beverly's father screamed as he was dragged back into the hall this time, and continued when his body came to a halt some distance from where Beverly stood.

*You're in pain.*

Yes, the ache was still there. She hated it, enough to wish she'd never been born. But, the Voice was there too, safe and welcome in her mind.

*And he made it worse. So, give it back to him.*

The Voice was vengeful, growling even, in lieu of its regular gentle, musical vocalization.

*What scares you most?*

The Voice knew what it was that frightened Beverly most, just as she did, because the Voice knew Beverly like the back of its hand (if it'd ever had one). Their thoughts were on the same wavelength, and it kept Bev steady as she stared at the still-screaming figure of her father and imagined the ache away.



What she saw after only amazed her.

Red rolled down the tacky walls of their hallway, drumming down in streams to slide across the floor in waves. It was dark and oozing, and it made Beverly's father scream until his eyes were about to pop out of his skull. Until the blood raining from the seams in the walls rose high enough to cover him entirely, filling up his hole of a mouth and silencing him completely.

The lake of blood in the hallway was up to her calves before she scrambled back into the bathroom and shut the door with a bang.

---

Beverly shuddered in the bathtub, letting her muscles suffer while she maintained her position in the awkward angle of being half-in and half-out. She scraped her nails against the bathroom tiles behind her when she wanted to get back up.

"Is he gone?" She asked quietly, as she leaned down and tucked a bit of loose hair behind her ear. "Can you see?"

*He is. He won't return. The television is back on, and the volume is back on.*

The girl nodded, her shaking limbs gently relaxing as her unseen friend's voice washed over her. She still needed time to calm down, but Beverly was grateful for not having to worry about her father coming back down the hall and busting into her room. It wasn't much of a bust, since he'd taken the lock, yet it was never a welcome nor

surprising occurrence.

She smiled, while tears ran down her lips and into the sink. Her hair fell around her face, sticking to her cheeks and dragging around the drain.

“I know. I can hear it.”

*You did so well. I’m so proud of you.*

“Thank you.” Beverly whispered into the sink.

*Always.* It answered back.

---

*When Beverly was little, she’d made friends with the voices coming out of her bathroom sink. It was unusual for a child to want to play in the bathroom without even taking a bath; but then Beverly had understood even before she’d developed a well-rounded consciousness that being around her father made her feel not-so-good.*

*It wasn’t suspicious when she was four years old, and when she was isolated from spending time with the other kids her age. Daycare was austere, and the other girls didn’t care for her much. With boys, it was easier – you just asked to borrow some crayons when you were five, or you shared your animal crackers at six, and they’d be friends with you.*

*But no one was as consistently generous with their kindness like the Voice from the sink. There were voices plenty of times, but she’d come to*

*recognize the softest of them as being The Voice. It never asked her for anything, and yet Beverly shared all her secrets, her wounds, her heartaches with It.*

*'I wish I was two inches tall, and then I could slide down the sink and go live with you.' She'd say more than once, over years of eyeing around every corner.*

*'I wish you could too, Beverly.' The Voice said, so sincerely it made Beverly's heart hurt more than it could handle. 'But you're strong. And you deserve to see the sun every day.'*

*She could easily remember being in need and receiving all sorts of things from the drain. Shiny quarters and pennies and dimes spat out of it when she needed to escape to somewhere in town and get out of the house. The Voice laughed at every joke she repeated from class, and cooed when the other girls, who never stopped excluding her like a disease, said their ugly words and threw trash at a 'piece of trash' like her.*

*And best of all, her father's advances were waning. She didn't have to take those pills all the time, or stop at his every whim unless he caught her and inhaled.*

*Her life was already fucked up, and if she was crazy, Beverly would make the most of it.*

*The lights in her dreams and the Voice from the sink were never far when it came to encouragement.*

*'If you're afraid or you need me, I'll be there. I'll help you float.'*

## 7. (7) Neibolt Street

### Summary for the Chapter:

In which there are sheep, shortcuts, and three short-of-breath boys.

### Notes for the Chapter:

This has probably been my longest delay for this story, and I apologize! I was held up during my birthday party this weekend and I'm afraid I haven't been feeling too well. I hope it doesn't show in my writing. Anyway, thank you so much for all the kindness and support. I'm just gobsmacked by all you wonderful readers and wish I could give you all hugs!

Mike and his Grandad never saw eye to eye on most things.

The young boy stared at his ceiling, taking even breaths as he sprawled in his bed. He hadn't slept a wink since after dinner, mostly due to the thoughts swirling in his head afterward. Winter was almost upon them, and yet Mike had his window open wide enough to rustle the curtains framing it. Mike could feel goosebumps pebbling all the ways down his arms and on the skin of his ankles, but he didn't curl up in the cotton blankets at his feet. Instead, Mike let the cold keep him awake as the alarm clock on his bed ride glowed in the dark.

He'd forgotten to set it for 6 am while getting ready for bed, and had had the thought to do it run around in his mind for hours, but Mike hadn't bothered. Exhaustion dampened his mood sparingly, weighed down on his limbs momentarily, but was avoidable.

"You've sure been busy." Mike's grandad had started. They'd been

having an early dinner, since the butcher's shop was shifting gears as far as scheduling went, and grandad was being roundabout in that cutting way of his that Mike had never enjoyed.

The Hanlon's had many farmhands, though their business required versatility come every season, and Mike didn't need to make as many deliveries when winter arrived. Instead, he tended to the animals a great deal more and was fixing parts of their barn, their equipment, their fences, and their house for when the weather became unbearable.

Mike pushed around the bowls next to him to get to the butter tray on his left. He sighed. "Sure. Hasn't everyone been?"

He didn't look up from his plate, but out of the corner of his eye Mike could see his Grandad's unimpressed gaze boring into him. It was doubtless that the older farmer had been wanting to bring up Mike's friendship with Ben, and that it took time away from Mike working, for a while now.

"Don't you sass me Michael William."

Mike braced himself. He'd already known since he was a child that Leroy Hanlon was a stern man, who didn't let impudence slide past him. It was hard to hold back sometimes, though.

"I didn't mean it that way, sir." The boy said dutifully. "I'm just not sure what you mean by busy. I've been cleaning out the chicken coops like you asked, it's just taking more time than I thought it would."

He hoped that his respectful tone would soften his grandfather's mood.

"More time, because of you spending time with that other kid every afternoon." Evidentially it had not.

Mike tried to swallow the boiled vegetables that he'd shoved into his mouth, but his throat had closed tight. Being 14-years-old, he wasn't the same kind of afraid of his grandfather as he had been when he was little. As a little boy, Mike had been afraid of being yelled at and had always assumed the worst of his caretakers when he made them angry, but nowadays it was mostly exasperating.

Although, Mike understood that he couldn't escape that pinch of the old fear whenever his grandfather yelled.

"You think that new boy is gonna think hangin' out with you is still hunky-dory by the end of the year?" Leroy asked outright, dumping more potatoes onto his plate before setting the bowl down.

It landed with a loud clink on the wooden dining table, and Mike sunk down in his chair. No one else ate with grandfather and grandson usually, as many of the men that worked on the farm had their own families and their own lives outside of this one.

"Answer me, Michael."

"I wasn't thinking about it." Michael looked at his grandad without flinching. He kept that respectful drone and that measured tone, but he was certain the other shoe would drop and that his grandad would

start yelling soon. "I thought... I thought it was nice having someone else to do stuff with outside of the farm, that's all I was thinking."

There was a long, pregnant pause after that, but Mike couldn't bring himself to begin eating again. His appetite had become nonexistent.

"I just worry, son." Leroy said, voice even again. "Most of the time these kinds of things don't work out. Your dad had trouble making and keeping friends in Derry all the time, too. You understand."

*I'm not my dad.* Mike retorted in his own mind. *And I'm not having trouble being Ben's friend. But just because you don't like it, that means I have to worry.*

Mike nodded. "I do. I understand. And I'll keep it in mind."

Leroy chewed through a mouthful of food, looking at his grandson with a hard stare before the conversation was deemed over with and they could return to eating in silence.

The boy felt aggression snapping at his nerves, but it was mild and he could hide it. Mike was practiced at hiding what he thought, irrespective of his being treated unfairly. His lot in life was getting the short end of the stick. Mike knew that by now.

*I'm not gonna stop being his friend just because you want me to.* He'd thought resentfully.

That resentment had carried over past curfew and into the very early, still-dark hours of the next day as Mike simmered over it. His gaze shifted from the ceiling to the clock and back until he kicked the covers over the bed post and sat on the edge. Mike let himself dissociate where he sat before he spontaneously grappled the shoes beneath his bed and took them downstairs.

---

The boy walked through the frost-bitten grass to the sheep pen, listening in silence as the ground crunched beneath his feet. He'd brought a flashlight, but it provided so little light as he twirled it around in the dark, around trees and up to the pitch-black sky that Mike had taken a chance and gotten some matches from farther into the house. He knew there was an old lamp attached to one of the beams in the barnyard beside the sheep, and he intended to stick around until dawn.

Mike shivered, but didn't know if it was due to the cold or because being out at night crept him out. He ignored it, if it was the latter, and slid the barn door shut behind him before his gaze swept the surroundings and he saw bundles of hay at the far side of the room. The Hanlon farm used an abundance of hay, as it was often used to coat the floors and make the animals comfortable. Mike could remember grabbing handfuls of the dry straw as a child and throwing them up like confetti above his head. He'd have so much fun, until he heard a gentle, amused voice call for 'Mikey' and he'd go running as far as his little legs could carry him, right into his mother's arms.

Now, he was 14-years-old and as he slumped over onto the blocks of hay, Mike felt the draft of bitter wind outside rattling the lock outside and heard the braying of sleeping, dreaming sheep all around him. The stale smell of the pen and the itch of the feed against his palms were irritating, yet a comfort compared to the suffocating bed he'd left behind.



Dissociation took hold of the boy, until he was pulled from his thoughts again, not by sheer will or anxiety but by the piercing shine of two beady eyes outside the pen's slide door.

Mike glared at the creature, already anticipating who it was. He still had no idea how this particular sheep was able to get out of the confines of the pen without anyone noticing, but it wasn't a problem for Mike if his Grandad was never there to witness it.

"Don't." Mike demanded. There was little bite to his rasping voice, and clouds of breath made white escaped from his lips. The sheep was heedless of his warning tone however, and came bounding over like a lamb into the lamplight that Mike had turned on, bucking beneath the boy's stiff fingers until Mike's hand was resting upon its head.

This one was affectionate and its neediness proved that Mike had been right.

This was the same sheep, with the same lazy eye and the same inexplicable curiosity toward the boy. Its curiosity set it apart from the rest of the herd, in that Mike could *literally* find him apart from the rest of the herd and lingering nearby all too often. The docile beast reminded Mike of another, curious and sweet friend he'd had not long ago.

"Do you remember Mr. Chips?" Mike asked the sheep, smiling sadly while he gave in and ruffled the little curls on the animal's head. "You were all scared of him when he ran into your herd."

Mike remembered Mr. Chips. Grandad had let him have a dog – a puppy – with the intention of Mike training it to help with herding sheep. Leroy Hanlon had wanted Mike to have more personal responsibility in his life, and had likely wanted his grandson to stop empathizing so damn much with every generation of animal he became familiar with.

It went unspoken, but Mike had gathered that his grandad's decision had been made in part to get Mike a guard dog as well. But of course, Mike had had to choose the most loving and trusting of dogs to be his. Mr. Chips had been too trusting, murdered before he could run the whole scope of the Hanlon farm, before a year had gone by.

Getting another dog was out of the question, not that Mike wanted to. He'd had few friends in his life, and after having a mental breakdown as he was forced to watch Mr. Chips choke and die because of Henry Bowers, Mike didn't want to another to endure that blind rage and torment that was reserved just for him.

The sheep cuddled into Mike's touch, snuffling and butting against him to redirect the boy's attention to itself. "I know you were all scared of him, but he was just a puppy. Maybe if you'd gotten to know him better, you would've liked him. You could've been friends."

Mike sniffed, momentarily feeling his true vulnerability and personal worry over Ben deciding to stop their friendship attack him like a centripetal force. They were all non-physical, abstract vocations, but it the genuine likelihood of that happening in the near-future was tangible.

When the sheep propped itself up on its forelegs, to try and get onto the hay with Mike, it made the boy laugh quietly in surprise. He patted the place next to him, intent on seeing if the animal could do it as he scooted over, and Mike clapped his hands when it made the jump.

Experiencing a moment of wishful curiosity himself, Mike laid down on the itchy bundle of hay and wasn't surprised when the sheep took to laying on top of the boy like Mr. Chips would have. It was like the farm animal could read Mike's mind, but he didn't mind much. The sheep was warm, snuggling Mike's torso while the kid pet its head until he was finally fast asleep.

-

Ben was waiting by the front door of Derry Public Library, just like he said he would, and his brow furrowed as he watched Mike come up the staircase to meet him.

"You okay?" Were the first words out of the new kid's mouth while he waved in Mike's direction. He was still waving by the time Mike stood five feet in front of him, and like clockwork it made Mike smile.

"Yeah, I'm just tired." Mike said, half-truthfully. "I couldn't sleep last night."

"Oh." Ben frowned. "... Well hey, we're at a library. If you fall asleep, I don't think anybody's gonna be too mad."

Mike shrugged back and they headed inside, shoulder to shoulder, before Ben's eyebrows knitted further. "Er, unless you snore?"

Hanlon snorted loudly, earning his first 'shh!' as they entered through the metal detectors.

---

Mike fingered the many books they'd piled together on their shared table, which was more of a bench by any given standard. The boys had had no motive in coming to the library, aside from the fact that they had both ended up on the topic when they'd last hung out together. Mike had talked about trying to find out more about Derry, and how his teachers didn't know that much about the town despite most of them having lived there for years, and some for their whole lives.

"I don't mind reading to find out more." Ben had said. "I love – I mean I like them okay."

"I love to read." Mike countered, to save his friend some embarrassment. "What kinds of books do you like best?"

Ben lit up like a Christmas tree, face open and sunny as his lips split into a grin. "I – well I like all kinds! But at my old school there were a lot of kids who thought it was weird that I liked non-fiction the best. My dad had encyclopedias all over the house when I was, I dunno – 5, I guess. You wouldn't believe it but my mom gave me the paper car manual from in the glove compartment to read when I was still in my carseat."

"Seriously?"

The stacks in between them now ranged from history books about Derry and Maine to historical fiction about people like Paul Revere and Marie Curie. Mike took note of Ben's choices, and saw that they weren't as eclectic as his own – aside from the obligatory Derry material, the other boy favored books related to engineering and... space? There were at least two bible-sized texts about satellite communications and space races. They looked wordy, for lack of a better term.

“Do you know a lot about Derry, Mike?” Ben asked, finally sitting down. His whole face was hidden the mountain of books, and Mike could only see the top of his head.

“I don't know if I know a lot.” Mike and Ben shoved the stack aside simultaneously. “My family's lived here for decades, so I guess I should... We've mostly kept to ourselves, though...”

“How come?”

It was painful, how sheltered Ben was, frustrating almost. “Most of the town doesn't care for the Hanlons, and never have. We're outsiders.”

Ben showed a complete lack of understanding with the way his chubby face creased. His eyes were engulfed by the look of distaste and confusion that he had no chance to hide. “That makes no sense.”

Mike felt a spike of anger bludgeon his stomach. He had

never intended to get angry at Ben, so perhaps it was the lack of sleep or the last conversation that he'd had prior to this one with his grandfather. In the back of his mind, Mike bemoaned the idea of this becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, where he'd get angry at one of his only friends and they'd part on bad terms.

"But I get being left out." Ben shrugged it off. His face softened. "I just got here and I'm an outsider like you. It's stupid either way, since no one knows what they really want."

The poison feelings subsided. "Yeah... yeah, people are weird."

"Everyone's a hippogriff, am I right?" His friend smirked.

Mike burst out laughing at that, and the two ducked as another violent 'shh!' slashed through the air.

Mike whispered. "You mean hypocrite?"

"Oh... right."

---

Mike wished his curfew was more of a guideline than a strict rule, but that was like wishing for an apocalypse and actually getting it. He held the door open for Ben as the two exited the building. Mike hadn't gotten any books to borrow, but he carried one of the three

that Ben had checked out as twilight turned the sky from bright blue to a mix of pinks and purples. Derry was in shadows, quieting in the face of a premature night, and Mike's teeth rattled audibly as they steered their bikes from the side of the building and rode down Kansas St.

"Do you wanna come over sometime?" Ben shouted against the wind. He was afraid to lift his feet from the pedals as Mike was doing, but the consternation in his expression hinted that he was willing to try.

"We can try to figure out the quickest way to the river, and go when its warmer outside, like this summer? If you want."

Mike's tipped to the side as he considered it, feeling light as a feather at the thought of spending the summer with somebody who wasn't a literal chicken. "Sure! But why the river? Let's just go to the quarry!"

"The qua..." Ben's voice was drowned out, as was his figure, by the speeding car behind them. The boys looked back, fighting the blinding of the headlights coming their way just to see the faint outline of Patrick Hockstetter's gangly form and Victor Criss's bleached white hair fanning out with the breeze. There were whoops of delight following Mike and Ben as they raced down the emptied road, and it sent a chill down Mike's spine.

"Shit!" Mike exclaimed. He knew Henry Bowers was at the helm of the car barreling down the road, and that there was no way that that ugly excuse for a human would waste an opportunity to mow Mike down.

He could hear blood roaring in his ears, and his heart pounding against his ribcage, but Mike was fixated on the look of fear that Ben

shared with him from just a leap across the stretch of road they still glided on.

“We can split up!” Mike shouted over the whipping wind, his legs pumping the pedals harder.

“Why?!” Ben cried.

“They’ll only get one of us that way! And Henry will probably go after me!” Mike would stake his life on it (again, literally) even if Henry had it out for the new kid.

“What? No way!” Ben must’ve been running on pure adrenaline, because he was adamant in spite of everything. “I’m not gonna just leave you!”

Mike opened his mouth, but the argument was cut short as they skated over a sharp turn and lost the headlights that had invaded everything the eye could see a short distance back. The boys were riding in the wrong direction – it dawned on Mike that in their haste, they’d sought refuge on Neibolt St. subconsciously. Or Mike had sought it, and Ben had simply followed without question.

“Hey! I know that kid.” Ben broke the temporary silence, eyes squinting in the sinking sun over the horizon. There was a rather small boy ahead of them, also on his bike. “Eddie Kaspbrak! What’re you doing here?”



The boy in front of them froze like a deer in headlights, turning to stare at them over his shoulder. He cowered before Ben and Mike had made a untimely stop next to him, and next to the last house of the street: 29 Neibolt House.

“I was taking a short cut!” Eddie spluttered, eyes wide and hands just above his bike handles like he was ready to put them up in surrender. It looked like a common practice for the asthmatic. “My house is this way.”

He gestured with a shaky hand out past the patch fence of 29 Neibolt, and Mike wondered if the kid had more balls than he let on.

“What’re you doing here?” Eddie retorted after some fumbling. “You live the other way, don’t you?”

He scrounged for a name, but Mike didn’t pester him for it. “Yeah, but we took a wrong turn.”

“Henry’s gang’s following us.” Ben added breathlessly.

It shouldn’t have been possible, but Eddie’s eyes got wider. “You brought Bowers over here? He’s coming this way?!”

“We didn’t bring ‘em. They followed us!” Ben exclaimed indignantly. “They’ve been after us since we left the library!”

Eddie gripped and tugged viciously at his hair, face pale. “You

brought stalkers. The worst possible stalkers imaginable!”

In the middle of the conversation (if you could call it that), Eddie’s watch went off and the blare dueled with the thrum of an engine in the distance. Every sound was a death null, boxing them in and yet giving them away while out in the open; colorful figures before a stark, dilapidated dark building, shaking in their tennis shoes and still-winding bike wheels.

Ben whirled around fast, more concentrated in his efforts beside the flighty Eddie and Mike, who was still and frozen and unable to comprehend the situation for what it was.

“We have to hide.” Ben said.

“Are you fucking crazy?!” Eddie screeched without missing a beat. “Where are we supposed to hide?”

“This house! It looks empty.” Ben nodded toward 29 Neibolt in the background. It towered above the boys like a mountain.

“Ben. No.” Mike shook his head violently.

“Why not?” He disputed.

“My mom’ll kill me. My mom! She’ll... oh Jesus Christ, she’d gonna keep me in the house till I’m in my 40s.” Eddie tripped over his own

tongue, speaking so fast that Mike couldn't quite catch his every word.

Ben bemoaned the indecision, fumbling off his bike and throwing it down onto the road as he made his way to 29. A quick comparison between having to hide in this creepy house for a few minutes to having to face Henry Bowers and his knife or Patrick Hockstetter and his lust for payback proved the first option to be the better one. From the look of it, 29 didn't have any occupants to begin with.

"Come on!" Ben rolled his hand frantically in the air once he'd reach the front door. He jiggled the knob until it opened the slab of wood, and Ben coughed as got a waft of dust in his face.

"Wait! What? What about our bikes?" Eddie asked with a squeak, already throwing his down. Self-preservation was winning against the unknown horrors that lay inside the notorious house across from them.

Mike turned to him sharply. "You wanna drag them inside with us?"

"No! I'm just –" The roar of the engine was getting closer and Eddie jumped in his spot frantically. *"I'm trying to be practical what if they see them then they'll know we're here!"*

Mike shook his head. "We don't have time to hide 'em."

Hanlon gulped, feeling beads of sweat form at his hairline as he grabbed Eddie's wrist and dragged the smaller boy out in front of him before he steered them both in the direction of the house. Eddie kept rambling, becoming more and more frenzied the closer they got.

He walked up the front steps instinctively. "First we didn't get back to town from the hospital with Bill till it was 8'o'clock, and my mom wouldn't even let me go to school the next day. She locked me in my room and practically fed me bread and water under the door, *like a fucking prisoner of war*. Who knows what's next when she finds me beaten to a bloody pulp in a hobo house-crack-den-germ-infested-rats-nest-Addams Family-haunted..."

Mike looked back, keen eyes locking on the flash of blue and silver coming from their right. Bowers' car was speeding around the corner and making its way down the road, heading for 29 Neibolt House.

"We're gonna die. We're all gonna die." Eddie continued, hysterically. Ben seized his arm from in front, while Mike shoved the shorter boy's head under the planks of wood barring the door so that the house could swallow his meek body whole.

"And then my mom is gonna find a way to resurrect me just so she can kill me herself. Then I'm gonna die twice."

Mike was the last to follow suit, ducking inside and shutting the ancient door behind them all.

## 8. (8) 29 1

### Summary for the Chapter:

Another Warning: Patrick features in this chapter so expect sociopathic POV, perverse means of sexual gratification, implied child murder, and body horror.

Anyway...

Patrick hopped out of Henry's car, and hit the ground running. He hooted and hollered as he recklessly tore into 29 Neibolt House's front yard and slammed his body against the paint-chipped exterior. Debris fell like snowflakes from the house's side, including long-legged and irritated spiders.

It didn't matter to Patrick, when he flipped open his lighter and licked his lips before waving the flame beneath the scrambling arachnids.

"Patrick!" Belch was the second to lumber into the yard area without a care in the world, grinning from ear to pimply ear. He took off his hat to wipe sweat from his greasy brow, and chuckled lowly at his friend's haste.

"Wait up!" The bulkier of the teens was halfway up the front path, bogged down by his sagging pants.

Behind them, Vic and Henry hung back, taking a slower pace. Victor was almost always silent all the time, but Henry had an unhinged look in his eyes that didn't bode well with his quiet demeanor. He and Patrick locked eyes, and the clear fury all over Henry's face was icing on the cake.

Patrick cupped two hands around his mouth, and shouted. "Having second thoughts, Henry? Ol' buddy, ol' pal?"

"Get your ass down here, fuckface." Henry snarled quietly. "We're not going in yet."

A breeze followed his words, which boomed despite his carefully

controlled tone, in the seemingly empty lot. The house in front of them howled, but showed no other sign of life... outwardly, anyway.

---

“You’re on my foot!”

“There’s spiderwebs in my hair!”

“They’re probably just cobwebs...”

It was difficult to make out more than the bare outlines of things that had been abandoned in 29 Neibolt house the moment Mike turned his back to the outside world. Nevertheless, that didn’t stop him or his two companions from diving deeper into the room they’d entered.

They blundered in the low lighting from the nearest windows, which from a glance looked as if they’d been smeared thoroughly with grease. Mike trembled uncontrollably at the bare wisps of web and thick dust that clung to his skin with every movement, feeling as if the air were full of electricity come to wreak havoc on his senses.

There was something wrong with this house, or something just very, palpably strange about it. Mike was just too wracked to figure out what made it feel so crowded and tingly apart from the mess inside it.

Mike yelped when something brushed over his leg, but slapped a hand over his mouth before his scream had a chance of echoing in the spacious house. Looking down, Hanlon’s eyes rounded into two identical moons when a hairy rat the size of his hand scurried past. He followed the rat with his gaze, and saw a sooty piano lounging at one wall. He peered at the obscure script that greeted them from above the unused keys – *Good Cheer... Good Friends*.

The stout shadow of Ben turned to face him, and Mike could make out the curve of his face in the shadows cast over his pale skin.

“What do you think we should do, Mike?”

“You’re asking *him* when it was *your* idea to come in here in the first place?” Eddie gasped.

“Calm down.” Ben brushed a hand against Eddie’s shoulder to steady him; but it didn’t do anything aside from make the smaller boy jump a mile high in the air. “It’s gonna be okay. And his name is Mike, by the way.”

Mike spoke before Eddie could argue. “Maybe they won’t come in. Even jackasses like Henry Bowers and Belch are scared of hobos –”

“So people do live here?” Ben interrupted.

“That’s what people say.” Mike said.

Ben was confused. “Wait, which people?”

The trio pivoted where they stood when metal against metal interjected, stunning them all into silence until they heard heavy footfalls on the road outside the door. The boys weren’t far enough away to miss the death null of all four bigger, nastier teens making their way into 29.

“Okay. Never mind.” Mike shook his head. He lifted both hands just to push Ben and Eddie backward, and while they stumbled, both boys did reasonably well in backing away. “We gotta hide.”

“I can’t breathe.” Eddie puffed heavily while they fell back, grasping the back of Mike’s shirt and Ben’s sleeve to remain steady instead of going for his inhaler. His brain was in full panic mode, essentially. “I’m gonna pass out.”

“No, you won’t.” Mike replied.

“What if there’s a back door? You won’t have to faint then.” Eddie looked over at Ben, who’d turned to Mike in time to miss how much he’d offended the hypochondriac on their left.

“I didn’t say faint.” Eddie bit out angrily. “Don’t say faint. I’m not a girl!”

“Okay!” Ben said defensively. “Sorry.”

---

*Pennywise put a finger to his lips. “Shh.”*

*Georgie snickered, cold hands coming up to brush against his cheeks while he beamed at the clown above him.*

*“Shh!” Georgie repeated, mischievously.*

*“Ge-ee-orgie.” He pretended like he was annoyed, but the corner of Pennywise’s lips stuck up contradictorily.*

*The little boy stomped over, sloshing water all over the place before remembering midway through that they were being quiet now. He stood beside his friend, unable to contain his excitement – something new was happening.*

*“What? What is it?” Georgie asked eagerly.*

*The finger that Pennywise had held to his lips lifted, and the light at the edges of their pretend world grew lighter. The gangly clown looked like he was in the midst of a ‘eureka’ moment as he expressed surprise in the most hyperbolic way possible.*

*“We have guests.” He said.*

---

Maybe there was a back door, but finding it before Bowers and his gang found them was not a risk that the boys were willing to take. They stuck together instead of splitting up, which no one had suggested (thank god) and kept on their toes while trailing up the rickety staircase toward the unknown. The boys faltered while



maintaining their uneven circle, while smacking each other's shoulders or tugging hard at each other's clothes to signal for attention. That rule had had to be swiftly amended to anything truly alarming unfortunately, since every hiding place was *alive*.

They had to rely on hearing any cues toward Bowers and his friends closing in on them as soon as the front door screamed a familiar indicator that it'd been opened. The trio were in luck that the whole house creaked and groaned with the slightest bit of pressure and that, in its constant gloom, 29 Neibolt was anything but silent.

They were also shit out of luck because of that, but you worked with what you were given.

"Do we have any weapons?"

Mike ruminated over what was in the bag he'd brought to the library while they surveyed the halls that extended both ways. It was hard to tell which hallway was worse and what surprises lay at the ends of each, though they seemed to stretch infinitely, as far as the eye could see.

Mike had been stuck in the middle of their party, but he could very well see unidentifiable stains spattering the floor and just about every wall of the upstairs. Walking through the cobwebs that layered the living room and the entrance into the kitchen that they'd neglected had been like walking through a room up to its ears in security lasers. If anything could be said for the hallway, the creepy-crawly feeling overall because of those things had lessened considerably.

And oddly, the change was comparable to a fog lifting from Mike's mind.

He listed what he had: there was A History of Derry, a reasonably heavy book, and some old gloves he'd forgotten to take out before leaving home. Aside from snapping said gloves at the enemy, Mike couldn't picture either object being that useful – you'd have to throw them and hope for the best, the best being that all four bullies would be knocked out by a book and the wonders of latex in their eyes.

Mike sighed. “No. I can’t think of anything that’d help us.”

Eddie had rummaged through one of his fanny packs and was huffing from his inhaler, eyes rolling in his skull as his lungs got a break. The boy was still shaking, but he was quieter and he managed to nod in understanding in-between gulps.

“I don’t have anything sharp.” He whispered at last. “Just think! If any of us had anaphylaxis or an enema right now, we could’ve had a chance to live.”

Ben, on the other hand, decided to opt for rifling through his (new) backpack instead of going through a mental list of what he’d brought like Mike had. At any other time, Mike wouldn’t have minded, but this wasn’t the best of circumstances in which to make a huge fuss like he was.

The boy slumped, his whole head engulfed by the bag. “I don’t have anything either!”

When Ben popped out entirely, paperclips and a square card flew up with the motion and Mike got down to help him pick everything up quickly. The farmer’s boy flipped over the card and stared at its lamented cover.

“Why do you have a postcard of the Standpipe in your bag?” Mike asked.

“What?!” Ben shot up from the ground, though Mike had yet to do so himself. “What’re – No. That’s nothing!”

“You’re new, not a tourist.” Eddie added over Mike’s shoulder, impending panic attack momentarily forgotten while he too stared at the card.

“It’s not the time for this – guys, I’m – Okay, stop! Give it back!” Mike winced when Ben grabbed the card from him and stuffed it back where it’d come from, face as red as cherries. He wasn’t thinking hard enough to be angry or annoyed at his new friend’s mortified reaction.

There were bigger things to worry about.

---

Patrick was held back by the scruff of his neck, like some mangy mutt, while Vic and Belch entered the haunted-looking house first. He was pissed enough to pitch a fit over Henry's mistreatment of himself – to complain that the piggies that they'd been chasing had probably gotten away.

Nonetheless he didn't, having sense enough to infer that going against Henry now – while the Hanlon kid was close and Henry was sniffing him out like a bloodhound – would score Patrick something worse than a few punches and a kick in the groin. Henry's dad's switchblade was shining from their leader's pocket, close to Patrick. Just not close enough.

"Are we... really gonna... you know?" Vic's cracking voice sounded from the mouth of the house. He was whispering, but then he couldn't do it successfully when his balls hadn't dropped yet.

Belch stuttered. "Uh."

"What'd you say there, Reg?" Patrick was jerked around by the ear, Henry glaring holes into his head in a silent warning that he keep his mouth shut. They were going for the element of surprise, something relatively foreign to the four bullies before today.

"We're gonna kill 'em, kill the first one you find and nobody'll come lookin'." That's what Henry had said during their little team meeting before, frightening the daylights out the less bloodthirsty Vic and Belch.

On the other hand, Patrick was more than ready, both to tease his inferior comrades and to string up a snotty not-yet freshman and play with him. The black kid was Henry's, of course, because it *had to be* (not that getting rid of the Hanlons by death or by driving them far, far away to the ends of the earth would ever make Henry's daddy proud of him, or less of a dick). So Patrick had his pick of the asthmatic or Tits – whichever he spied first.

He didn't doubt Henry for a second, nor was he scared.

---

Unknown to and unlike their counterparts, the four teens separated the moment they were inside 29 House. Henry let go of Patrick, shoving him to the side as he rounded decaying furniture in a forgotten living room, providing further proof that Henry Bowers was turning into a crazed sleuth on a hunt.

Patrick might've timed it if he cared enough, but it wasn't long before Belch began smashing anything made of glass with his token baseball bat. Vic had taken a spray can from the collection outside and was exercising his right to draw as many dicks and obscenities as he could on the already decrepit walls.

Keeping quiet had been a pipe dream anyway.

Henry all but growled when the first floor delivered nothing. "Check upstairs!"

Belch bounded up every step with copious amounts of laughter at his heels, while Vic and Patrick followed behind as gaily as kids in line for Christmas presents. Henry was slow but deliberate, falling in step with Patrick as Mr. Serious while they stormed both hallways. It was a wonder these losers were still alive, since every boy that had even the second-most knowledge of a good thriller movie knew that you didn't run upstairs like a blonde with huge tits and a tiny brain. The killer, the villain, the monster – it always got you.

Belch laughed long and loud as he burst into one of the rooms and a girlish squeal went off like a shot from the inside.

"LOSERS!"

Aha! Exhibit A.

Patrick's grin was snake-like while one loser after another, all three were wrestled from where it was that they'd been cowering like maggots infesting a dirty crevice. All three were smaller than Bowers gang combined, and coated from head to toe in grime. Patrick watched, hands flexing at his sides as took steps back until he was

peaking around the corner of the stairway banister.

Belch had two in his arms, the fat kid and the black kid, and Vic had the smaller one who was flailing about like a fish out of water.

“Stop moving!” Vic yelled helplessly as the boy squirmed loose. It was no use.

Eddie tumbled back from the rest of the group, and that was when it got perfect.

Patrick took the opportunity presented gladly, swinging around the staircase and appeared an inch away from the shivering Eddie. **“Hey wheezy!”**

The boy screamed before he could turn all the way around, and when he did, Eddie was flipping backward down the other side of the hall. He screeched shrilly, backed by the chorus of his two shit-stains for friends while they fell into the clutches of Vic, Belch, and Henry. Henry, whom Patrick had turned his back on, stared at Mike with wide eyes and was near salivating mutely at the chance to get to him while he struggled in Vic’s arms.

The moment that Patrick tugged one of Eddie’s arms to pull him forward then drop him to the ground like a ragdoll, the force of the boy’s fall provoked a deep groan from the timeworn floor in the hallway. A hush fell over the entire group, all eyes on little Eddie Kaspbrak as he sobbed openly before the ground beneath him gave way abruptly and he vanished.

“Eddie!” Ben screamed as he watched the other boy fall through the weakened floor and out of sight. That was, before Ben’s world went black once Belch Huggins pulled his shirt up over his face and squeezed his middle as he struggled, further humiliating the terrified child.

---

Eddie fainted the instant he hit the ground floor, but to the boy it felt like he’d simply closed his eyes for a flash before he opened them

again and was greeted by the sight of an incoming Patrick Hockstetter.

Patrick grinned at the younger kid. He'd raced down the stairs once Eddie went down, and praised Jesus that Ed wasn't dead from the fall.

He had his lighter and the handy can of spray-paint that he'd remembered to bring at the ready. It had been rolling and clanking around on the floor mats in Henry's car as they'd raced into Neibolt, just begging to be used on a spineless worm of a not-yet freshman. Patrick was sure that Eddie Kaspbrak, who sat back with a look of helpless fear beneath him, was the perfect candidate for it.

"Don't! Don't! Please!" Eddie lifted his arms above his face, shielding his face when the lighter flicked on and a bright, hot burst of flame shot through the air. "No! No! I don't wanna die like this! I don't wanna die... Please..."

He repeated himself, moaning thickly and disjointedly as he cried unceasingly, but Patrick was laughing. The older boy's facial expressions twisted from mocking to him looking entirely possessed by the joy of hearing Eddie beg.

"Aw, poor baby." He got on his knees, hissing at the pleasure and pain from the sting of his skin and bones banging against the rotting floorboards. "You sure you ain't a girl, Kasper? You cry like a girlie. A girlie-boy."

Tongue against teeth, Patrick ignored the swipes at his face as he got closer to the boy's tearstained face. "You beg like one, too."

His pants had gotten tighter with the close-up action, and Patrick breathed in deeply while snot leaked from Eddie's nostril and he heard the whistling under the younger boy's ragged pants. Patrick wondered if the little asthmatic would piss his pants out of fear, and the thought delighted him so much that he smiled with an open mouth. A dark gap shown from where he'd lost his tooth weeks ago.

A piercing whine broadcasted from behind the teenage boy, and like an earthquake siren it had an immediate effect on Patrick. His back

cricked loudly when his attention snapped back from the fun he'd been having to the rest of the room. Patrick singled out the worn, browning refrigerator right behind them.

The blood sapped from Patrick's face. "No."

It couldn't be happening. Not again.

He started toward Eddie again, frantic this time. "Have you been pulling this shit? Is it you?!"

Eddie couldn't speak, still in tears. Patrick wrapped a hand around the boy's throat and squeezed.

"You and those cocksuckers you call friends are trying to scare me, aren't you?" Patrick's eyes bulged, spittle flying from his mouth into Eddie's face as he screamed. "How did you figure it out, huh? What do you want out of it?!"

"I – don't – I –" The smaller boy gasped.

"You think you're smart, but I caught you! I *caught* you, girlie-boy, and I'm gonna get you back!" He was hysterical, laughing and crying as his face changed from white to red and back while he throttled Eddie. He yearned to drown out the crying that hadn't died down with the satisfying snap of this boy's neck.

Patrick's chuckle sounded as if he were underwater through all the tears. "I spy –"

Patrick gagged.

The discoloration around his bulging eyes spread, enveloping the red and white in a sickly grey. Patrick lost sight of reality entirely, unearthed by the inexplicable need to cup a hand beneath his mouth, his face puffing up while his cheeks expanded as something wriggled around behind his lips. Something was moving in his mouth, peeling itself out of the hole made by his lost tooth and filling him up quickly.

A slippery, worm-like infestation that was taking place inside wasn't just extraordinary and unexplainable – it was making the teen sick.

Patrick felt the burn of his bile inside of his throat as he heaved and puked all over the dust-ridden floor. Bursts of black slug-like creatures twisted and squirmed as they hit the ground and wasted everything they touched with oozing puddles of saliva. Patrick couldn't scream, though he choked and wheezed uncontrollably when it dawned on him that the worms in his mouth were not worms at all, but *leeches*.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Again, I apologize for the delay. I've been sick, but you've all heard that before. I hope you enjoyed reading it!



## 9. (9) 29 2

### Summary for the Chapter:

Warning: Body Horror, Beatings, and a Racial Slur occur in the following content. Please be advised.

### Notes for the Chapter:

I had a whole cheesy intro planned for this chapter but I got red in the face and had to stop. I hope you like this one, though!

Patrick's arms were wide open, hands tensed in the air whilst he struggled. The leeches were everywhere, coming out of his gums, up and down his throat, slithering from his slobbering mouth. He'd started choking a raw minute ago, but the pain and the profound fear that displaced his mind entirely made him helpless.

He didn't want to *see*. He didn't want to *touch*.

Eddie lay crumpled on the floor, completely forgotten but staring in horror at what was happening before him. There was a shooting pain running up and down his arm that was hard to ignore. Regardless, Eddie couldn't tear his gaze away from the escalating scene of Patrick fighting the impossible. The younger boy watched, not daring to breathe, as black leeches poured from every visible orifice of Patrick's body. He saw black leaking from his nose, down his ears and joining that which fell down his chin.

Eddie had to finally turn away when the black squirmed out from beneath Patrick's eyelids, his stomach turning so forcefully that Eddie was inches away from vomiting.

---

Ben remained apprehended at a distance, fighting against Belch and Vic after his shirt had been slashed down the front and ripped up the sides. Henry had saved him for later, or so he'd claimed, but to Ben's horror, it was much like the older teen had forgotten about himself and everything else completely. Ben's yells and screams for the Bowers gang to stop, and to know where Eddie had went and if he was okay, were immaterial in the desolate room they were being held captive in.

Ben's voice couldn't cut through the fabric of his shirt, that which had been used to gag him with, as Mike thrashed beneath Henry's brutal grasp for an incalculable chunk of time. Ben had cried out on behalf of his friend for so long that by the time his abductors had the idea to stick a gag down his throat, he'd gone hoarse. At the rate that things were worsening, the sound of Mike getting pummeled, his flesh smacked and his muscles aching, was going to be the only thing left to hear. That, and Henry's occasional voracious, sick taunts and the slurs he spat.

Henry was livid, but his limbs felt tingly and numb while he punched, smacked, and scraped his dirty nails at every scrap of Mike that he could get to. It didn't take encouragement for him to revel in the pain he was inflicting – though Belch made feeble attempts at cheering him on while at the same time looking positively green around the gills. As he flayed another groan of pain from the boy at his disposal, with only a sucker-punch to the stomach, Henry knew that Mike's dog had been a poor substitute for the actual kid.

“Your family made an awful mistake sticking around this town.” He seethed, staring daggers into Mike's eyes. One was twitching, puffed up and dark purple. “At least your mom and dad figured it out. It's just too bad they couldn't pass it around to the rest of you.”

Henry punctuated the ridicule by jabbing his elbow into his victim's ribs, leaning in while Mike coughed through the blood cascading from his nose and over his left cheek. Mike, despite groaning and moaning, despite the hitch in his breath and him wheezing when the air was knocked out of his lungs, endured the torment with a heavy but angry quietness. His eyes had trouble focusing and his ears were ringing, and it was difficult to breathe through the mouthful of blood.

Death could've been inbound, but Mike wouldn't give Bowers the satisfaction of hearing him plead and beg.

"Hey. Hey... uh, Henry...?" Vic's pubescent voice broke his concentration entirely, and for that he earned the leader's wrath.

"What the fuck do you want?!" He turned on the scrawnier boy, roaring, but Vic's fear wasn't nearly as satiating.

He gobbled spit at his blonde crony and didn't bother looking to see if it landed on him or not; instead, Henry spun on his heel and marched to the corner where they'd thrown Ben and Mike's bags. The switchblade was still comforting as it remained in Henry's pocket, but he wasn't going to bother with it just yet.

Mike's satchel had spilled open and the enormous block beneath its hood had attracted Henry's eagle eye.

Henry shook the object out, and when he heaved *A History of Derry* from the unswept floor there was an oversized leer on his angry, beet-red face. He paused to behold the state he'd brought Mike to; the black boy that he'd sought after for so long was scraped to the knees and spattered with blood. Mike had to have skin littered with bruises by now, and possibly a broken bone or two somewhere around his torso, but it wasn't enough.

“I’d say it was a shame that you don’t get to pass it on neither.” Henry said with deadly calm. “But that’d be a lie, wouldn’t it? Soon as your nigger grandfather finds you holed up in this shithole, it’ll knock some sense into his head.”

Mike panted, breath harsh but shallow. He raised a hand above his head in a last ditch-effort of self-defense. On the other side of the room, while the two bullies holding him gulped and pussyfooted, Ben’s efforts to get out and run to Mike’s aid were reinvigorated. The strap of shirt that had been rubbing against his cheeks was looser now that Belch and Vic were getting cold-feet.

Henry towered over Mike, the low-light of the room casting his face in thick shadow, until his cold eyes seemed suspended by nothing but air. *“But first, I’m gonna knock some into yours.”*

Adrenaline pumping through his veins, Henry lifted the book above his head and prepared to swing it down like an executioner’s blade.

Ben broke free of the muzzle after some trying.

“Stop!” He screamed, whipping forward to pull his arms free. “Mike! No! Mike!”

His scream became a wordless howl when there came a deafening *bang* tantamount to a gunshot going off in the large, empty house. Ben fell, or was thrown rather, to the floor and hit the ground with a painful thud, raising clouds of dust that took over all that was

in sight. Ben coughed through the mouthful he'd inhaled, shedding tears while the sting of it hit his eyes and flew into his nostrils.

Ben coughed and coughed as it cleared, only to realize that another presence had entered the room, putting all else into a gridlock.

"Dad?" Henry, baffled and incredulous, asked. *A History of Derry* tumbled from his hands, and Mike jumped and wheezed with the pain as it landed just short of hitting his shoulder.

"What's going on, here?" Butch Bowers walked in confidently. He swaggered in his police uniform, gun at his side like the switchblade that Henry had pocketed before leaving home.

Henry's mouth hung open as he searched for words. "What're you *doing* here?"

"Ohhh Henry. You think I'd have missed those tire tracks you made skidding on over here?" The officer shook his head while glaring at his son, who appeared so much smaller while he quivered beneath it. "You were supposed to be home hours ago, boy."

"I wasn't... I forgot. I'm sor-sorry." Henry stuttered, feeling hot. He was rooted to broken floor while it groaned beneath, as if mocking the internal anxiety broiling in Henry's body. "But, Dad, I –"

The older man had begun to take on the livid expression that his son had had a second ago.

“You two.” Belch and Vic straightened the instant they were barked at, like two put-together soldiers for the first time in their lives. They looked about as terrified, and didn’t feign not showing it. “You go on home. I’m sure your parents are sick to death of waiting for you.”

They were frozen. The officer was wringing the front of Henry’s shirt in the time that they stayed gaping.

“Go!” Butch shouted. Henry stifled a whimper, a reflexive whimper, at the volume of it. That kind of shouting was reserved for his father’s episodes, usually.

They sprinted out, Belch running like he’d hit a home run and Vic running... well, Vic ran faster than he had ever done in his life before that second when the threat of being murdered by a man of the law came into play. The thunder of their footsteps could be heard while they tracked through the house, all the way down to the first floor before a mysterious quiet ate up the sound.

“I’m so sorry for my son’s behavior.” Butch reached out to Mike with one hand, though Mike didn’t reach back. “He has such a temper. I’ve heard terrible things about what he’s been doing to you kids.”

Mike stared at the man, mute and bewildered, while Henry did the same while still in his clutches.

The sincerity in Butch’s voice and how respectfully he was addressing Mike Hanlon of all the kids that lived in Derry was enough to snap to snap the teenager out it. His head cocked violently.

“Dad?”

Henry’s father turned back slowly, and the transformation from him frowning dolefully as he always did to him opening his mouth in a smile, set his son on edge. But Henry went stock-still when he the sight of rows and rows of sharp, needle-like teeth revealed themselves as the smile grew larger.

The sight went unseen for Ben, who crawled over the floor and approached the befuddled form of Mike. The tubbier boy felt as if he were sinking through the floor, with how much dust had accumulated on it over the many years, and wrapped a hand around a cleaner patch of Mike’s clothes. He startled, but Mike turned around and was instantly attuned to his friend’s wide-eyed but determined look.

“Can you move?” He whispered. “We gotta get outta here.”

Mike swallowed, nodded, and let Ben wrap a doughy, soft arm under his shoulders while they continued to crawl from the ensuing battle between father and son.

-

The Losers were forgotten. Completely and utterly forgotten.

This man, confronting Henry so closely that Henry could feel the smack of blood wafting from its nightmarish mouth, wasn’t Butch.

The man wasn't a man at all – what human being could stretch their mouth to reveal so many rows of jagged teeth?

“Henry...” The mask that still looked like Henry's father was humming in a voice that the teen didn't recognize. It sounded juvenile, like a kiddy-voice before its tone began fluctuating from a high to low pitch.

“*You* looked like a *nii-ice* boy, once.” It said. “But I know *better* now.”

Before he knew it, the hand that had had a fistful of his ruddy tanktop had raced up and secured itself around Henry's throat. He was rising from the floor and soon Henry dangled several feet in the air – prey caught in a spider's web. Henry tried to kick out with all his might. Henry didn't know if the impulse was him wanting to escape and flee or to fight back and land a blow with his feet, but his body swung uselessly. He fell back and rolled like a pendulum, back and forth, back and forth.

The teen's hand morphed into a claw-shape as he dug his nails, cracked with Mike's drying blood, into the look-a-like Butch's face to get a better grip. His attempt smeared the natural pigmentation of his father's skin. Lurking beneath the mask was a blinding, cracked white and red surface, and the normal blue of Butch's left eye smoldered a burning yellow below Henry's hand.

Henry's eyes widened, and the insults that he'd wanted to hurl at the stranger built into a resounding bellow, ripe with terror. The indescribable half-man's jaws opened into a great yawning cavity and engulfed Henry's hand from it'd remained entrenched in Its skull.



---

The scream torn from Henry's throat filled the rest of 29 Neibolt House and caused Ben and Mike to fall down several steps while they escaped. Ben, white as a sheet and stricken with fear, had ripped off parts of his ruined shirt and, in addition to keeping him propped up, held a bunched-up rag to the side of Mike's head. The other rags were plugging Mike's nose as he tilted his head up, knowing what to do after a lifetime of practice.

They rushed down each step as fast as they could.

"Eddie! Where's Eddie?" Ben looked from left to right. The front door of the house was hanging wide open, perhaps after Belch and Vic had deserted their other superior 'friends' while running with their tails between their legs.

Mike gurgled "He fell from the floor in the opposite hallway."

"And Hockstetter went to look for him." Ben gnawed on his lower lip. "Maybe Officer Bowers caught him first?"

After Mike ventured a shrug, he and Ben limped around the lower banister and made way for the kitchen. It was the room that neither Ben, Mike, or Eddie had looked through in their first trial of hide or escape, but that was where the hallway from which Eddie had plummeted sat above.

“You’re alive?!”

It was dark in the kitchen, save for just a trace of light still gleaming from the window, but Ben and Mike could make out Eddie’s face as he gawked at them in shock. He was sitting on the floor, as well as the panel of carpet and wood from above, and looked no worse for wear aside from his unbending arm.

“So are you!” Ben called out, feeling undiluted happiness in knowing that the three of them were, in fact, alive. He supported Mike, who continued stopping his bloody nose but who smirked a tad at the realization, all the way to where Eddie was.

“How’d you get away from Patrick? Did Henry’s dad scare him off?” It was unexpected, but there was no one else in the kitchen aside from the boys. Eddie looked petrified at the mere mention of Patrick’s name, however.

“No.” He croaked, eyes shifting rapidly from side to side, like the teenager could jump out of the blackest corners of the room in an unsuspecting flash. “No! Nobody came here. Nobody was here when he – he started – I-I don’t know how to explain it!”

Mike waved one hand, brushing aside the rag that had been under his nose and revealing that the blood had stopped spurting. He and Ben knelt behind Eddie, intending on supporting him this time, in case their stricken peer had broken a leg.

“There was crying, like a baby crying and-and suddenly he started going hysterical! Hockstetter – he-he was choking me and then he just stopped! He stopped! And he started choking and all these black worm things came out of his mouth and everywhere else!”

Eddie flailed, barely registering their assistance behind him when he went wild-eyed. “And it wouldn’t stop and he was turning pink and purple and grey and-and-and-and – And he just vanished!”

“What?” Mike asked flatly, possibly due to the swelling of his mouth and cheeks.

**“He fucking disappeared! Like fucking – Houdini – Augh! Who the fuck knows?! He was here and then he wasn’t!”**

Eddie started gasping. “I don’t know what the fuck is in the air here, but it makes you see fucked up shit and I wanna go home!”

“Where’s my inhaler? Did you see it up there? Did you grab it?” He looked anxious at the mere prospect, hands sliding around and splintering on the broken wood beneath him. “I think my asthma attack stopped in the middle of everything but – it’s – I think it’s coming –”

Ben thumped Eddie’s back, but to no avail. The smaller boy was huffing and puffing, clearly on the brink of another attack, and Ben didn’t know how to begin handling it. A quick look around the kitchen area in the dying light revealed no ‘black worm’ and no Patrick Hockstetter. But something about it all had to be true, or something about Patrick had to have scared Eddie so badly that he was able to get as worked up as he was then.

“Just – Listen, breathe.” Mike shook Eddie’s good arm to get his

attention. "Breathe. Calm down."

"I can't fucking calm down!" Eddie cried, only making Mike latch on tighter.

He stared into Eddie's eyes. "Yes, you can! Think of something that'll calm you down."

The other boy shook his head despairingly.

"Listen! Listen, look at me. Look what Bowers did to me." Mike cupped Eddie's head in both hands, adamant. "Look. I just got the shit beaten outta me, but I'm gonna be okay. So are you."

"I know it. I know." Mike said. "You're gonna be okay. We're both gonna be okay."

Eddie and Mike stared at one another in prolonged silence, silence without words until Eddie's heavy breathing settled and evened out to make it truer than thought possible. When Eddie nodded next, it was for Mike to let go. His lungs were stabilized, though they had no way of knowing why. In the end, it didn't matter, and the boys were already balancing against each other to get up.

They crumbled to the ground again when a voice was thrown in their direction.

*“Here, Eds.”*

Eddie shrieked first afore Ben braced an arm around him and over to get around Mike. Mike pawed at his friends as well, scanning the area ahead of them instinctively to find the source of whomever was speaking to them now.

He, Ben, and Eddie saw the flash of white and red all at once, standing as still as a statue beside the broken-down fridge, soundless now.

The person had a large face, mostly covered in the darkness between the three boys and its place in the shadows. And yet, its skin that had to be sallow than sand was cracked into fractals at the orange hairline like his makeup had dried on thick and hadn't ever been removed. Lines of red formed his glistening mouth and trailed through the green-blue eyes that shone out of the obscurity all around them.

From what had been seen and what could be seen now, the character opposite them was some crude version of a clown.

The clown's voice was a pulp of soft, scratchy and harsh, as though he were still calming down from previous bellicosity. The ruffles on his chest and about his shoulders rose and fell quickly while he stood, hunched below the part of the ceiling that was in-tact, with his gangly arms held at his sides.

It was a long, long moment before one of those arms extended toward the fidgety boy on the floor, who remained cradled by the other two, spellbound boys. The clown unfurled its white-gloved hand and produced Eddie's formerly lost inhaler.

“I think you dropped this, Eddie.” It had caught the device between the floor and the ceiling from where the child had fallen, and the pale stranger had found it with such ease. “That’s okay. I found it for you.”

A cacophony of whimpers and frightened gasps occupied the stunned taciturnity that followed, and Eddie clambered back while dragging Ben and Mike with him. The trio didn’t get very far.

“D-don’t you need it?” It asked when none of the children made anymore sudden of movements. The inhaler was held carefully between the person’s fingers, which opened and closed steadily as a sign of insecurity.

The clown wanted to move forward, but did not.

Ben’s voice was a shell of itself. “Who are you?”

“...” The waiting clown then took a step forward, the hint of its lips in the dark crimping up in a small but eager grin.

Yet it hesitated, mouth drawn and moving until it pressed a hand there and felt the fresh blood clinging to its skin. Had Georgie seen blood on his mouth, would he have befriended It at all? Even if It was Pennywise the Dancing Clown, would Georgie have trusted him and been so kind?

“N-n-n... *no one*. No one.” Instead of leaving the lingering clots of

shade that curled its misshapen fingers over Its enormous self, It bent as low as possible and left the inhaler on the floor.

No one could move. Only Mike, rather courageously, took the gift between his fingertips when he got out from under the other boy's arm and crawled to the center of the floor. Mike snatching it quickly from the horribly tall person that stared at them as best it could with its unfocused pupils.

"Than... Thank you...?" Mike succeeded in saying, still staring at the figure as he placed the inhaler in Eddie's lifeless hands.

Those eyes, along with the rest of him, crept back into the darkness behind him. The eyes, too green to be real, watched the three huddled children without moving before their glow disappeared in a blink.

The clown had vanished, as miraculously as Patrick Hockstetter had vanished.

## 10. (10) Regret

### Summary for the Chapter:

I'm worried that you guys won't like this chapter, but it's hard to explain why. Warnings for body horror and tooth-rotting fluff, and for this basically being a recap.

“I’ll need to go away for a little bit, Georgie.” Somber, withdrawn, and so suddenly unlike himself was the clown that let Georgie wrap his arms around.

The boy clung as tightly as he could, staring into Pennywise’s green eyes when given the chance to speak with him properly and face to face, but it was Pennywise who couldn’t help but linger. The need of his friend to seek out affection, especially through what Georgie called hugs, had been so ‘other’ for It at first, and he’d been sure that he didn’t like them at all. At first. Low and behold, however, when it came time to choose between obtaining a tangible meal and being without a hug. The decision took some thinking and some internal whining over why he could not have both.

Pennywise did, in fact, know very well why. He’d turned it over and over in his ancient consciousness, which had to have been so empty and bereft of any claim to meaning before he’d been given a hug.

Georgie didn’t care for the inner-workings of the clown’s mind, having no forbearing knowledge of what Pennywise had been like prior to Georgie or of how it was that mind that maintained everything one sensed in the mindscape. The child patted the despondent Pennywise’s cheek, then got the bright idea to hook his fingers in the corners of his mouth and pry them upward.

He laughed at the sight, bringing Pennywise back from oblivion and making him genuinely smile. Pennywise’s smile was unique, as



Georgie called it, and forming one led to a puddle of drool dropping from his lower lip.

“Eww!” Georgie laughed uncontrollably, then grew grave again. “Where’re you going?”

“I want to say hello to our guests.” Pennywise enfolded the little boy’s tiny hands in his and brought them down, shifting so that Georgie’s arms were at his sides. “But, I don’t know if these are good guests or bad guests. So, I want you to stay here. I’ll be back in a pinch!”

Georgie was quite young, so young that such a remedial explanation would check out with him and not rouse potent questions. An explanation like that would’ve given Georgie’s mother or Georgie’s father a pass as far as putting the logic together. Still, Pennywise felt a brush of that unnamed magic that warmed him like a hug or a laugh, when Georgie did argue.

“But it’s no fun here without you!” He whined, but the boy radiated pure... earnestness.

Pennywise’s demeanor softened up quite a bit whenever Georgie was blithe like this, as the clown had learned.

“Well, we can’t have leave you with *no fun*, can we?” Pennywise patted Georgie’s cheek, and mimicked the boy’s smile before standing at his full height. “Let’s see what I can do before I have to go.”

It was endearing when Georgie trotted after him like a duckling following its mother, when one minute Pennywise was trying to get his bearings by matching the expressions his little friend made and the next, Georgie was doing the same.

Endearing, or better yet, considerate.

Showing the DeadLights to Georgie to keep him calm and keep him (blind) safe was out of the question entirely. Pennywise knew that if It expelled its energy and illusion in another vicinity, Georgie would only be trapped in his unconscious body in his hospital bed until the clown returned. It was so difficult to deny the human child anything, though.

Georgie's consciousness departed into a different place altogether, once Pennywise thought of it, and lucky for It – theatrics would be necessary when it came to greeting aforesaid 'guests'.

---

As far as appetizers went, Henry Bowers was decent. Biting into the skin was heavenly when It-as-Butch-Bowers felt the *pop* and *snap* of bones, tendons and ligament, and Henry's pain receptors going into overdrive. It'd been a while since It had dug into youthful, strong flesh and since It had been able to enjoy the whole morsel without plowing around a skin disease here or a failing heart there.

The teenager's scream was like the sizzling of meat on a grill, if It had any way of describing just how special that perceptible terror was. Raw pain was a sliver on the spectrum of feelings that It could taste, more a physical accessory to what the boy's brain communicated – emotional fear and helplessness were stronger. Savory.

The flavor settled on Pennywise's tongue, leaving him satisfied for some time before he felt the glow of tasty fear turn to ash in his

mouth. Eddie Kaspbrak's fear was not tantalizing like it should've been, not with his soot-covered face frozen as it was and not when Mike Hanlon reacted with a mixture of pulsing fear and stabbing bravery.

Fear and bravery were just a shot in the dark away from one another. This, It knew, without a doubt in its mind, and despite the tingling of... pride? Hope? Solace?

In It's favorite form...

It wanted nothing more than to sink into the floorboards of its home. It was an unreliable way of leaving the scene and the trio of thunderstruck faces would only mutate and twist into unforgiving looks.

Horror was mutating already, into something unforgivably mystifying.

---

Pennywise whisked away like leaves disintegrating in a traveling wind, leaving nothing behind once the inhaler was retrieved. He blinked out of existence and reappeared in the next flicker of compacted warmth and energy, appearing a short distance away to the real prize for the evening. Initially, the clown had wanted to slink into the well and let the journey clear his mind, but he wanted Georgie to return even more.

-

The teenager was half-dead already, though he still had blood to give to the few leeches that Pennywise let remain on his pale skin. Patrick was barely breathing, but his wheezes were deafening in the otherwise silent underground. They were surrounded by walls that gladly echoed the smallest of sounds, from the steady drip of water out of the sky-reaching ceiling to the harsh pants from his new and rather vile companion.

The blood would not be so sweet as Henry's, primarily because Pennywise had left Patrick to exhaust himself. He'd wasted more than enough time giving back the inhaler, and had let the summit of Patrick Hockstetter's fear burn out until the teenager was wrought with emotional and physical collapse. Standing over him now, Pennywise could see that there was life enough there for Patrick to realize that he wasn't alone in his agony. It was a wonder, however, if the solipsism in this child prevented him from finding something worthy of hope in the appearance of a human-looking creature passing by.

Sometimes they saw him and, in their drunken state of fear and tiredness, believed he was there to save them. Surely, Patrick, near blind and dying, would spare a little of that.

The air around the boy changed, and Pennywise was surprised at all being reinvigorated with a new waft of terror. It was as if Patrick wasn't seeing Pennywise at all, but something else entirely. The clown had an inkling as to why – but he cut Patrick's attempt at a strangled scream off before that thought in the back of his mind could come to a head.

“Your tongue is rather wiggly like a leech, wouldn't you say,

Patrick?” Pennywise smiled. “Old buddy, old pal?”

The tongue between Pennywise’s agile fingers came loose and into his waiting gloves for hands. Patrick jerked against the ground, bones bouncing against the sewer floor as his mouth sputtered blood. The clown caught the back of the kid’s skull with ease, and kept his eyes pried open as wide as they could go before stuffing Patrick’s tongue into his mouth. It was obscene, rolling the tongue around in his mouth and sucking loudly, but it was also karmic and that was just what Pennywise wanted.

Patrick bled out, convulsing, before he had nothing left to give – his time had run out.

Georgie wasn’t here. He didn’t have to look as Pennywise guzzled on the remains.

That was what mattered.

## 11. (11) The Dreamlands

### Summary for the Chapter:

This chapter's all over the place. Warning for the mention of a disease.

*When Bill opened his eyes, and saw himself on a Ringling circus stage, it didn't register as confusing in the slightest. If one could embody a whole feeling that was described by the expression 'oh', then Bill was feeling it as he sat up and looked around.*

*Dreams were funny that way.*

*Instead, Bill took interest in that he was, essentially, in an enormous circus tent that had peculiarly solid-seeming walls with vertically stripped wallpaper that flared out the higher and higher those same walls rose. The world around him was colorful, full of popcorn-yellow and jaunty green and soft, but still vibrant blues as cartoonish elephants balancing on tiny bouncy balls and lions roaring on podiums before juggling bears and fiery hoops were depicted on all sides.*

*Bill swore that the longer he looked at the pleasantly-drawn scenes, the better he could hear them happening faintly from somewhere unseen. At the same time, he felt a tug of something unsettling in his stomach at how he'd seen these kinds of things before. Not here, but somewhere – somewhere that one was sure to find Georgie, whom loved wholesome circus things of all kinds.*

*This wasn't Georgie's room, but it was similar. Being inside this enlarged, altered version was wonky too, like being at the bottom of a popcorn container or at the end of a tent that was somehow managing while it was propped upside down.*

*Bill felt a tap on his shoulder, and likewise with waking up in a circus of some sort, the boy felt no sense of surprise at seeing his little brother behind him.*

*Georgie smiled, not in hospital clothes but while dressed in his bright yellow rain slicker and his green galoshes. Bill turned and opened his arms, feeling happiness like a balm in the middle of his stupor, as though he and Georgie had known they would be split apart for some time and were simply reuniting.*

*'Billy!' Bill held onto his brother tighter, and noted that the smaller boy was solid and warm just as he would be in reality.*

*'Did you like 'em?' The little boy asked innocently, after pulling back to beam at his older brother. His raincoat was dripping all over the floor, despite there being no rain pouring down anywhere.*

*'Like what?' Bill asked.*

*'The balloons! It was Penny's idea to get 'em for you, since I couldn't. I thought it was a good idea though!' The little boy looked proud. 'I had good in-put. Are you still sick?'*

*Bill thought back as Georgie bounced up and down in front of him, but it was hard to remember anything outside of this. 'Who's Penny?'*

*Georgie huffed a frustrated sigh, so sensitive that he was prone to changing emotions in record time. The same old Georgie. 'Pennywise! My friend. Don't you remember when I told you about people talking under the sidewalk?'*

*'The... sewer...' Bill tested out the memories coming to him in a trickle. 'Nobody lives in the sewer.'*

*Georgie frowned deeply. 'Penny does! He does, and I can prove it!'*

*The hands that had been keeping Georgie in place fell as the boy took Bill's hand and started tugging.*

*Bill could hardly follow, still remembering. He ground his heels into the stage beneath their feet. 'Wait! Georgie, wait...'*

*The younger boy looked over his shoulder, confused and yet, it only helped Bill put things back together again. 'We can't go. You're supposed to be home. We're supposed to be home.'*

*'Yes...' Bill nodded to himself. That sounded right.*

*'But Bill, it's easy! If you come with me,' Georgie pivoted back around and blinked owlishly, face pensive yet pleading. 'You'll float too.'*

*The dusky shadows that had formed an overlay against the wallpaper around the two boys was falling away into a darker haze, like the beginning of storm clouds as they reached the epitome of ire and set the sky ablaze with lightening. It was more than daunting, but it didn't appear to frighten Georgie whatsoever.*

*'We can teach you!' Bill's mouth hung open as his baby brother grew more excited at the prospect of being reunited, and at them both being taught how to 'float', whatever that meant. 'Then we can all be together!'*

*'G-Georgie.' Bill's stutter was returning as the clouded platform they were on grew morose and fragile. 'I want us to be to-together, but you need to come home!'*

*'No!' His smaller counterpart looked ready to stomp one of his galoshes into the blackening stage in a fit. 'Home hurts! I don't feel good when I try to go back. And I don't... like it at home.'*

*His little voice trailed away, giving into what might've been shame or fear, and Bill didn't like it one bit – but he understood where his brother was coming from. Feelings of loneliness and the more pronounced feeling of being a very real, very sorry excuse for a burden, seemed to void every*



*other sense Bill might've had in this imaginary realm.*

*His mind was less focused on an entire roster of things and more clot with emotion. Though he tried to fight it, Bill felt like **he** was the seven-year-old boy now, unable to overthink and reason with the way Mom and Dad seemed to... regret the existence of Georgie and himself. At the plane of reality, Bill had grown taut and ready to justify his father's distrust in his sons' capabilities or his mother's flippancy when it came to who was raising them.*

*Bill could be content, for a little while, with his process of thinking so long as he thought in an adult way, where he knew larger words that never came stuttering when they formed in his brain. He could overlook being there for Georgie ten times the average amount a boy would be there for his little brother, or find comfort in being stronger because of the resilience that he, Bill, had to keep living every day while being less valued.*

*That's what adults did – they put off reality as much as they could. And so did kids, although it was usually with a safety net, and far less jeopardizing.*

*Bill wasn't an adult, though. Bill was still a kid, and so was Georgie. A phantom or a specter of a kid in a dream, maybe, but of no less value to Bill because of it.*

*Bill could excuse a lot in real life, because he had to, but if he knew anything it was that he needed to take care of Georgie, and that his baby brother needed him, too.*

*'Georgie...'*

*'You can be here with me, Billy! Penny will teach you how to float so we can just stay with him! It's nice, you just gotta learn to float, too!' Something above them was thundering, like a wheel over pavement or something heavy and clopping over aged floorboards.*

*'Bill. You can! Come with me and you'll float too!'* The younger boy reached out, heedless to the sound and the frightful change of the room.

*Georgie reached out with one arm, hand turning through the air desperately. He was fading from view as a drawing might, were it being erased rather hastily. Bill's eyes flickered around in fear as the scenery started to give way completely, and his mind stuttered to a brief stillness at the shadow of pipes dripping like leaky faucets above them. Darkness began to clash with fingers of light from an unknown source above the boys, searching until they gained a proper hold on Georgie and Bill was tumbling like a leaf to the wayside.*

*He could no longer see his little brother in the confusing haze.*

*'You'll float too!'*

*'You'll float too!'*

---

*You'll float too!*

Beverly shifted awake, and missed hitting the bathtub faucet with her forehead by an inch. Though it was abrupt, she'd stirred with enough reason free from sleep-addled disquiet to see it suspended above her sleeping form.

She ducked before carefully crawling around the spout and sitting up in the tub, feeling a familiar pressure at the back of her neck that did nothing for the light train of nausea tunneling in her cranium. At least the cold that was sweeping over Derry didn't discriminate when it came to making her and her father's crummy apartment as frigid as possible. The blanket she'd taken was thin and didn't prevent her skin from turning to gooseflesh in barren environment.

Intellectually, Beverly didn't care. Cold was good for concentration

and clarity.

She didn't consider it strange unless she looked at it from a distance, but Beverly felt the most comfortable sleeping in the bathtub or on the tiled floor with just a pillow and a patchwork quilt. Her own bed was fine, she supposed, but if she lingered on that object as well it only left her feeling ill and empty.

That was never the case with the bathtub. Though now... as she drew her legs up and curled her arms around them to seek as much inner-warmth as she could – as while her brain showed no love for heat that made one lethargic, her body craved it – Beverly felt restlessness in her bones.

She wanted to call down the sink for what felt like ages now. It was inexplicable, but she was hesitant to ask if her friend was alright after enduring a period of absolute silence since the last incident with her father.

But she hadn't, as whenever the courage worked up between her lungs, Beverly felt strangely naked whenever she had the nerve to try. Her words came out clumsy, and Beverly didn't feel like she had her proverbial footing in trying to reach down into the pipes with spoken words alone. Communication, she knew, was a two-way street and honestly, if the Voice was fantastical in some way, shape, or form, it had to be one-half of the whole that made their bond work. Didn't it?

To Beverly, it was like she didn't have the power to make things happen without the Voice for support... even if all she wanted to do was ask if the Voice was okay. Well, that and she missed having another person to talk to, but that was far less altruistic and probably shameful, somehow.

The girl rubbed her eyes, feeling childish for thinking that way. Beverly arched her back, stretching her legs out over the rim of the tub before sliding around to stand on the floor and leave her unconventional bed. She inhaled deeply then, as close to silently as she could get, she exhaled and looked around. It was probably dawn, or a little later. Her father was no doubt passed out on his armchair after drinking himself into nothingness.

Beverly shrugged, bones popping beneath her rumpled dress – it was time for school.

---

She lit a cigarette whilst leaning against the back wall of the school, and held it expertly between her fingers before taking a drag. And already, the young girl could feel herself warming up inside, feeling a pleasant shiver due only to the familiar pall of smoke drifting down to her lungs and lightly toasting the back of her throat.

A car swerved into the parking lot – smooth, glossy and probably as new as new could be by Derry standards. Although, while Beverly didn't follow the popularity behind cars, she estimated it to be only a couple of years old compared to the sodden fords and vans that littered the high school lots. Hand-me-downs from parents to rowdy adolescents with licenses and jobs of their own.

Beverly couldn't say for certain if the fresh paint on Dr. Tozier's car was any indication; but she could tell by the slump of his shoulders and the way he pushed his thick glasses up the bridge of his nose like it was a nuisance told her that little had changed in Richie's home life. His mouth jetted open enough to be visible from a

distance as he hopped out of the back seat (oh, poor baby, being relegated to the back like a toddler) and let the car door slam behind him.

His mouth was a mess. Not an unfixable or hideous mess – not a ‘Patrick Hockstetter’ mess – but one that had nothing to do with the raunchy jokes that funneled out every day. The worst part of it, seeing it openly, was that his family had the means, the direct means, to fix it but never did, no matter how many one-liners Richie had up his sleeve.

Irony. The poor kid was beset by irony.

Richie turned on his feet, just enough to make Beverly feel genuinely sorry for him as he nervously pushed those glasses up again and waited for several seconds. Bev watched with a cocked head and squinting eyes while the boy stayed quiet and still for once in a blue moon, in case dear old Dad had any nice sentiments to give his son.

But the tinted glass didn’t roll down, and Richie barely had any time to back away before his father’s car was peeling out of the school and leaving exhaust fumes in his wake. A spike of spitefulness pinned Beverly’s heart like a spear in that moment, as the boy played it off like nothing had happened. Very few kids including her were milling about, sleep-sand at the corners of their tired eyes, but it mattered to Richie regardless.

Beverly’s mouth worked while he stepped closer, away from the hurt and embarrassment, and she almost missed her chance before blurting. “Hey, Bucky Beaver.”

Never let a taunt, cruel or playful, escape the scrutiny of Richie

Tozier. The trashmouth boy's shoulders rolled and his lips opened in a breathless scoff, but when he looked at her fully, Beverly felt like she was under the heat of a spotlight.

"What do you want, Marsh?" His tone was on the verge of complaint.

Beverly smirked. "Is that really the best you can do?"

"What?" Mouth opening wider, this time in confusion and just a tinge of awe.

"Ya know, I thought I've always thought I would meet my match if we ever had a contest over who can talk the most shit." Beverly said. "You're holding out on me."

He looked at her and pulled at the straps of his backpack and looked at her, before breaking into a tentative smile. A real smile, not a nasty one. "I can always do worse, but you probably hear 'worse' all the time."

She gasped melodramatically.

"So, what I'm hearing is, that you're afraid you'll get beat by a girl." Beverly's eyebrows rose, and she threw down her cigarette just to smush it with her flats.

Richie scoffed loudly this time. "Nuh-uh. You think I'd go easy on

you just cos you got softer skin and prettier hair than me? Fat chance, *Marsh*.”

If it were possible, their shoulders both squared simultaneously, like cats getting ready to play fight, or in Richie and Beverly’s case, to throw down.

“Richie!”

Beverly followed the high sound instinctively, and had never seen Eddie Kaspbrak run so fast in all her life. The boy’s tamed, spiffy hair was loose and flat around his ears, and his round, dark eyes were too wide for comfort as he barreled down from the townside entrance into the school.

What Beverly found even more surprising than that, however, was the sight of a pudgier, entirely familiar boy with him. Ben was hustling rather respectably, heedless of any self-consciousness as he raced at Eddie’s side. He was pink in the face, and panting quite a bit, but Ben and Eddie were virtually side by side when they stopped in front of Beverly and Richie.

“Holy. Fucking. Shit.” Eddie wheezed, but didn’t reach into either fanny pack for his inhaler. Ben, also breathing harshly, patted the smaller boy’s back helpfully as if he’d been the best of friends with the Derry-born kid since the womb.

Richie made a face, having made several disturbing impressions on the sight of his energetic friend, whose energy was selectively spent on telling them all about AIDS, almost falling winded onto himself and Bev.

“What the hell is that on your arm, K?” The bespectacled boy reached out, flashing warty fingers as he got a half a chance at feeling the makeshift sling bracing Eddie’s arm when the boy put up a fight.

Beverly hadn’t noticed it immediately, but she realized that Eddie was wearing multiple handkerchiefs (or bandanas) over a poorly put-together cast lined with duct tape.

“It’s a sprain! But don’t tell anybody. My mom doesn’t know, and if any of the teachers find out, I’m screwed.” Eddie whipped a finger to his lips, miming for them all to keep secret, and it floored Richie.

“What the hell’s gotten into you, man?” Richie asked, rearing back with genuine surprise.

Eddie shook his head. “Nevermind! We’re trying to tell you something!”

Beverly wanted to know as well, but she locked eyes with Ben in the middle of it all. The girl smiled with her teeth, before mouthing ‘hi’ at the boy. He clearly hadn’t worked out how impolite (and nerve-racking) it was to stare, but when he remembered himself, Ben gave her the goofiest, sweetest smile in return and mouthed ‘hi’ back.

“The crackhead house?!” Richie’s exclamation broke through the lull that had fogged up Beverly’s brain. “Why the fuck did you go in there?!”

“Oh. My God. Do you ever listen? Seriously, I wanna know, because



if not then that would explain an assload of the shit you blurt out on a daily basis.” Eddie sounded more like himself then, while looking like he was sucking on a lemon. “I told you, Bowers and Patrick and Vic and –”

“No, I got it. Bowers Gang was chasing you, so you hid in the crack house that nobody ever goes into, and then some actual freaky shit started happening.” Richie stated. “I guess what I’m really wondering is how you’re even still alive right now.”

“Wait, what freaky shit?” Beverly asked. The three boys around her looked stunned at the mere question.

“Pa – Patrick Hockstetter,” Ben shifted between an outdoor voice and an indoor voice, though it made little difference. “He went missing. Literally. He went missing right in front of us.”

## 12. (12) Sleep 'n Study Hall

Veronica had stared at Beverly as she milled around with the others retreating to their individual classes that morning. She'd wanted to ignore it and had, to a degree, but the redhead felt those dark eyes on following her every move even after she'd taken a seat near the back of social studies class.

It was more than a little bothersome at this point, as after Myers had returned to school, she had become a withdrawn flake. A withdrawn flake whose eyes were never drawn to anything so inexplicably like Beverly Marsh as she went about her day, especially whenever Gretta or Paula snapped at her for being so distracted.

Bev didn't want to idle on what must've happened to Veronica to make her so spooked, and focused on the fact that she hadn't seen hair nor hide of Hockstetter *once*. She'd tuned out much of what Eddie Kaspbrak had had to say about staying in the Neibolt House for however many hours, and Beverly had no idea as to why. Regardless, she felt butterflies flapping around in her stomach over just the thought that she'd been invited to hear the full story behind what had happened to Eddie and Ben. She'd gotten up at the crack of dawn with no motivation to expect anything but the usual isolation at school.

The girl crossed her arms over her desk and laid her head against the soft sleeves of her sweater. Beverly's eyes grew heavy while Mrs. McCarty droned on about civics in the United States. She didn't know why the winner of the latest presidential election mattered to a class full of freshman and one or two sophmores. No one in the class was legally allowed to vote in the first place, and Beverly knew that if they were going to be tested on the three branches of government,

that she could just go to the library to find out what she needed beforehand.

Beverly had gotten by with average grades, based solely on piecing together what made the most sense during multiple choice quizzes. The only time when taking notes was ever relevant was when... well, when The Voice wanted to know about her day. She'd take notes for her friend, just to get everything good and everything awful as accurate as possible, because The Voice **cared**. Beverly was grateful that she could tell the difference between when someone really listened to her and remembered her stories and someone like her father, who only asked ritualistically and accepted a recap of 'it was fine' with relish.

Beverly sighed quietly, reminded of the reason for her downtrodden spirit before being in the right place at the right time. Although she hated herself for it, Bev's hopes were up that she was getting a chance at having friends again. She pondered the possibility of getting to do normal kid-things with Ben and Richie, Eddie, Stan, and... and Bill Denbrough, too. And yet, while the chance made her heart sing, it didn't commandeer the very real fear of trading in one friend for others.

She almost wished it would, for who knew if The Voice was more than a figment of her imagination in the first place? It had come up from the sink when Beverly was four-years-old.

-

*Beverly barely ever cried when she was little. When she'd been a tot, she'd gotten it backwards and thought, or decided more like, that adults cried a lot and kids didn't as much. Beverly had been a social butterfly once before her mommy died – or before Al Marsh claimed she'd died in that hazy before-time when she wasn't fully aware that things could mean more than what they appeared to be.*

*But once, when she'd been four and it had been a while since her mommy had disappeared, Beverly had tried to play basketball outside of the apartment. Daddy was hardly around then, he'd needed to stay at work for long periods of time, and he didn't care to employ a full-time babysitter.*

*Beverly had been skipping along the pavement, but tripped before she could run out into the open road. She'd skid against the ground in her gingham dress and cut up her knee and the palms of her hands. The tears that arose came after the constant sting of gravel in her skin and the blood oozing from her wounds, when she'd forced herself to wash away the dirt on her hands. The water made everything ten times worse, and yet Beverly had remembered to do it until the cuts were clean. Mommy was adamant about doing so before putting bandaids and kisses on boobos.*

*Beverly had burst into tears without warning, and cried so loudly over the basin with her red, red hair hanging down and soaking in the water. The only sound that got her to stop wasn't that of the front door opening as Alvin Marsh stomped in, but the distant, echoing jingling of bells.*

*Little Bevvie had woken something up in her distress.*

-

*"B... Bev... Beverly!"*

The harsh whisper drove Bev to straighten up and turn in her seat, and find herself face to face with the feverish Veronica Myers.

Veronica's eyes were red and veiny just above the sinking apples of her cheeks, and her frizzy hair was straighter and slicker after not showering for several days. She looked older than her 15 years, and

more than a little undone as she leaned in close to Bev's freckled face. Beverly noticed among everything else that the edge of Veronica's desk was cutting into her ribs painfully, and yet the older girl was so spastic in her desire to get to Beverly that she didn't notice it whatsoever.

Beverly was chilled to the bone in an instant, unnerved ever more so by having to look into Myers's whirlpool-like eyes directly. They were swallowing up every feature on Beverly's face, absorbing as Beverly tried to wipe the shock off her own face and replace it with a glower. Beverly knew, though it was difficult in that moment, to instinctively raise her defenses.

She had, understandably, hoped that Veronica was safe once she'd gone missing, but despite that short period of not knowing, Beverly was once again curdling over the tall girl's presence. Just looking at Veronica was enough for Bev to remember that this was one of the, if not the, closest allies of Gretta Keene.

And Gretta Keene was, as far as the hierarchy in their school dictated, a Queen Bitch.

"What do you want?" Beverly spat, piercing eyes set to narrow with blunt suspicion. "If it's anything other than 'to borrow a pencil', you can stop trying to get to me."

Veronica swallowed, but Bev was reminded of when her freshman year had begun and how, on the first day of classes, she been rammed right into one of the cafeteria tables and stained by the food she'd landed on. Gretta and Veronica's laughter had followed Beverly all the way home, and when Alvin Marsh had made big deal over it just to 'help' his daughter change out of her ruined clothes.

She remembered when she couldn't walk past the lockers without

hearing whispers over how she'd fucked Henry Bowers and Patrick Hockstetter at the same time, along with a handful of boys that Beverly hadn't spoken to since grade school. The only name that stuck with her in that right had been Bill Denbrough's, but then she remembered hearing the name of a girl or two as well, in between the slurs of 'slut' and 'whore' and '*cunt*'. The worst of the worst.

No, the worst was that they kept getting away with it from junior high to high school. Beverly had tried everything in the book, and had only learned one lesson after each attempt to reach out to anyone willing to listen – nobody cared.

The men and women that taught the schoolchildren of Derry held rumors of sexual conduct on her part up to a higher standard than her own account of things. They all knew her father was **off** and still used that to boost their beliefs that she was a "dirty girl". And Beverly, if she thought about it for more than was healthy, accepted that maybe it was easier for everyone else to blame her and not themselves.

"I've been trying to tell you for days now. I'm sorry." Veronica continued, twitching. Her expression was so visibly sincere and pained that it took Beverly by surprise to see. "I'm so sorry for what I did. What I was doing. I'm sorry, Beverly, *I'm sorry and I need you to \_*"

Veronica stopped herself, swallowing hard just as the desk dug further into her stomach. After contracting ever so slightly as though she were being shocked, Veronica pulled back her freneticism and gave Beverly a watery smile. "I just hope... that... you *can* forgive me."

Beverly's mouth hung open, and she found it hard to speak for a long

moment. “What are you talking about...?”

“Um... Beverly?” Said girl looked away from Veronica’s bloodshot eyes and saw Ben an arms-length away, nervously playing with the straps of his new backpack – a smudged blue thing with He-Man graphics that looked like it belonged to an eight-year-old.

“Do you wanna get going? To study hall, I mean?” He asked, awkwardly trundling back and forth between her desk and the door. Beverly realized that class had ended amid two of her respective crises, and she hadn’t been called out *once*.

“Yeah, let’s go.” It took energy to regain that spark of life that had been ignited in the morning before class, but the more Beverly saw of Ben’s sheepishly innocent face, the more comfortable she felt in her own skin again.

“Beverly?” Veronica repeated, forcing a divide in the younger girl’s attention. “I’m sorry. I hope you’ll think it over.”

Veronica jerked with every word, like a glitching animatronic or an overdramatic actor on the brink of self-implosion. Beverly couldn’t think of what to do to get Myers to stop doing that manic movement routine, so she nodded slowly for lack of anything else to say. And Veronica deflated, smiling in a way that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“Thank you.” She said nimbly, the sincerest she’d been throughout their whole conversation. Maybe, the sincerest she’d been in her entire life.

Beverly sounded weirdly flat to her own ears. “Sure.”

She stood from the desk and didn’t look back as she tugged Ben by the hand and had them race out of soc class and down the hall while the bell rung above them. Her braid flew behind her as they lapped around the corner and saw Stan, pacing like a jitter-bug. They’d all decided to meet in Richie and Eddie’s designated classroom for study hall (God help the teacher who had to put up with not just them, but three new friends in the next minute or so).

Bev pulled Ben along, springing up and looking over at his awed look in her direction. He must’ve been just as excited to tell his side of the story as she was to hear it.

---

Bill couldn’t move once he’d woken up. He found himself staring blearily at the ceiling, watching as a seam above him began to dark and expand like ink on paper. His mind was locked, unable to land on anything concrete, but he knew that it was raining again.

The water swelled in its little nook above his bed, and Bill watched the droplets balloon up to their maximum potential before the water was forced down to the ground and at the boy’s side. It hit his mattress and, suddenly, Bill’s limbs flailed in one second and he jolted up, back stiff as a board, just to sneeze loudly in the next. He covered his face and sneezed once again, and another time before he could even think to look at his bedside clock.

Bill was instantly alarmed, but felt too groggy to do anything about it. He’d slept through school – he’d slept all day! There were 20



minutes left, according to his (frustratingly silent) alarm clock, meaning that Bill had been asleep for 17 hours in total.

Bill felt like it'd been a lifetime since he'd been awake, with how difficult it was to leave the comfort and warmth of his room.